

A DAUGHTER
OF ST. PETER'S.

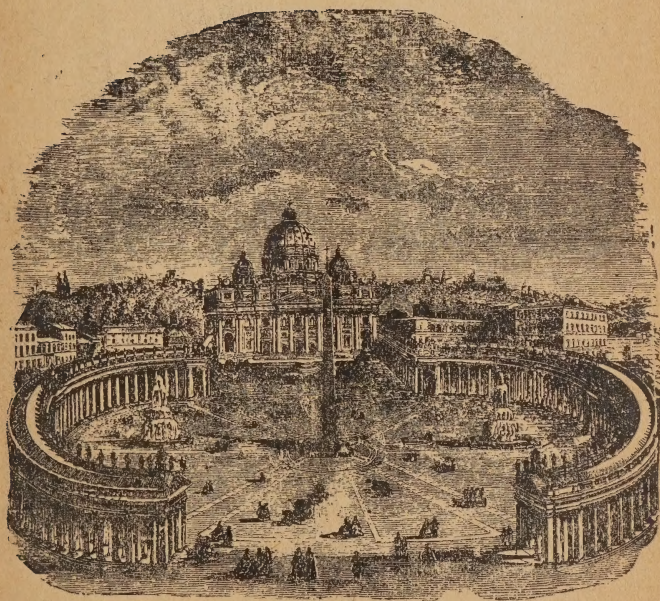
RB117,107



PURCHASED FOR THE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY
FROM THE
HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL
SPECIAL GRANT
FOR
CANADIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH



A Daughter of St. Peter's.



BY
JANET C. CONGER.

MONTREAL.

JOHN LOVELL & SON, PRINTERS.

23 AND 25 ST. NICHOLAS ST.

Entered according to Act of Parliament in the year 1889, by Janet
C. Conger, in the office of the Minister of Agriculture and Statistics at
Ottawa.

Miss Guther
with the kind regards
of her old & true
friend
H. Arthur

TO
THE PEOPLE OF THE DOMINION,
IN WHOSE ADVANCEMENT,
INTELLECTUAL AS WELL AS MATERIAL,
SHE TAKES A SINCERE PRIDE,
THIS STORY OF OTHER CLIMES,
THE FIRST FRUIT OF HER PEN,
IS INSCRIBED,
AS A MODEST CONTRIBUTION TO THE
GROWING LITERATURE OF HER COUNTRY,
BY ONE WHOSE AMBITION IS TO BE
A WORTHY DAUGHTER OF CANADA.

PREFACE.

THE characters in this book—the author's first attempt at novel-writing—are, with a single exception, “of imagination all compact.” The author can, however, claim some familiarity with the scenes in which they live their fancied lives ; and she has endeavored to make them think and feel and act in some kind of harmony with surroundings which are, in certain essential features, out of the beaten path of fiction. The central figure of the *dramatis personæ* took shape in her mind while it was under the influence of Religion's grandest shrine in the heart of Catholic Christendom. She is sadly conscious that her achievement does not fulfil her aspiration. She knows, notwithstanding the kind encouragement of too indulgent friends, that her work is far from faultless. She can only plead that this is the first child of her invention and hopes that, with all its shortcomings, it may have the good fortune to please that unfailing friend of the unknown and struggling writer, the courteous and benevolent reader.

WINDSOR HOTEL, MONTREAL, Sept. 3rd, 1889.

A DAUGHTER OF ST. PETER'S.

CHAPTER I.

THE night before Vane Hamilton sailed for Europe, he went to Delmonico's, to have, as he supposed, his last dinner in New York for some years at least. Owing to the recent death of his father, whom he dearly loved, and who was the last link that bound him to his native land, he was in no mood for inviting a hilarious send-off, so he said good-bye to his friends as he met them during his week of preparation for his departure.

His friends were all "men about town," and old college companions; he was one of them, but not of them, so to speak, as many sad incidents in his life of twenty-seven years had taken the glint of boyish spirits out of him; while his contemporaries still flashed with it, and some with an added glow. He knew very well the effect of a proper send-off by "chums," so the hour of his departure or even the day he had not named.

As he sat twisting his closed hands, and observing

them absently as he did so, no thought of what expressive hands they were entered his mind. He was unconscious of the "sweetness and strength" a hand can denote; he thought only of his almost solitary position in the world—how different every thing might have been if Clarice had lived and Naomi had been better loved and understood, while it was in their power to make the poor girl happy, and of his dear dead father and the lovely young mother he could scarcely remember, and whom his father never could forget.

Vane Hamilton was a strikingly handsome young man, but to tell what made him so would be puzzling; his fine, deep-set grey eyes or splendid teeth—the two striking features of his face.

There was a vivid intellectuality about him—a refinement and strength which make men handsome without any regularity of feature or perfection of form. He sighed as he removed his elbows from the table, and took his watch—held by a black ribbon—from his pocket, saying to himself, "Well, after all this is a dull way of spending the last few hours I have in New York." With all his indescribable air of being perfectly at home—a trait which American men possess more than those of any other nation,—he was supremely sad and dull, and ready to welcome any friend who might come in at the door he was facing.

He did not look down the room on the same side as he himself sat, or he would have seen a large, fair, jolly-looking young man reading the "Sporting Times," eagerly devouring the last race news, and indicating his satisfaction or disappointment by the sudden snapping way he would jerk the paper between his hands, or smile audibly.

At last he lifted his eyes from the paper, glanced about him, then rose hastily, and speaking to the waiter at his table, crossed the room, and with both hands outstretched and a beaming countenance he warmly grasped Vane Hamilton's, and in a hearty, loud voice exclaimed :

"How'do, old chum? Didn't know you were in town!"

"How are you, Curtis? only came last night," said Vane.

"Is it true that you are going to make an ass of yourself and go to Europe to study art?" said Curtis.

"I'm going to study art," said Hamilton, "or I think I am. I hope I won't be making an ass of myself by so doing," and he laughed.

"Let me modify that expression by saying that you're a *donkey* if you leave New York for art or anything else."

All the time Curtis was speaking he stood with his hands on the back of the chair opposite to Vane. Suddenly Vane exclaimed :

"Excuse me, Curtis, for not asking you to sit down. Do dine with me, like a good fellow. I'm quite alone, you see, old boy."

Then in a sad tone he continued :

"In fact, Curtis, I am all alone in the world now. I don't believe I have a relation."

"You have the satisfaction of not being a poor orphan," said Curtis, as he sat upon the chair he had been leaning against.

"Money isn't everything, Curtis!"

"It isn't, eh! Well, I just wish I had all I wanted or all you have, and I wouldn't be lonely very long."

"Why, what would you do. You couldn't buy friends,—relations I mean," said Vane smiling.

"Relations be d——d! Who wants relations? They pluck you bare every time; I only feel sure of the gold in my *teeth* while I am alive and can bite! Do you really want to know what I would do if I were you?"

"Yes, tell me," said Vane.

"Well," said Curtis; "I'd have a house in Fifth Avenue, and do the intellectual up in fine style; have reunions for all fads—literature, art, science, and all that; paint everything in dim æsthetic colors, and have virtuous loveliness worship at my shrine—that's if I were you. Then I'd have elegant apartments elsewhere, where the 'sound of revelry by night' would be heard, where less virtuous loveliness would

be at my feet—an idyl of wine and women, a painting of bright carmine. Oh, I'd make things hum—yes hum!" said Curtis, smacking his lips.

"'Pon my word, Curtis, it's almost a pity you have not more money."

"Almost! you say; well, 'tis quite a pity you have so much! Going abroad to study art! Bah! why should you study art? Just stay at home and get some poor devil of an artist fellow to do the work for you—draw the outlines and all that, and you just fill up with the paint, as the girls do, with only the solid colors on all the beautiful embroidered things their dainty hands make for us. Then get some impecunious art critic to give you a good blow-off and your fortune's made, in art. You could then be a man about town in high feather—a tip-top *masher* and no mistake—a splendid artist! A great catch! A millionaire and a deuced good fellow! Art be d——" exclaimed Curtis with great vehemence.

The listener's face changed from a look of amusement to one of astonishment, but he replied quite pleasantly:

"If I were younger and more impressible, your flattery and word painting would fix me in the firmament of New York life. But it's too late. I sail to-morrow. I am not after money or fame; I love the brush for pastime and pleasure, and in following my whim, why, if fame follows it, I won't say it nay; but

I could not prostitute so noble an art to win such doubtful fame as you speak of."

"I don't suppose you could. You know I am apt to speak at random," said Curtis, looking rather ashamed, and his fair face flushing a deep red, then he continued :

"I really think you are a fool for your pains though ; if you would leave out that art-studying business, I'd forgive you, and if you were not a human iceberg, you'd stay and taste the sweets of life ; or you'd just go abroad to get rid of some of your surplus cash, have a good time and blow off steam. But you won't do anything—you'll come back just what you have always been, marble-ice !"

"Do you think, Curtis, I've lived twenty-six years and never tasted the sweets of life, as you say ? I suppose you mean love." His face lost its sad expression.

"Yes, I do. Is that a fact ? Do tell me all about it," said Curtis, as he placed his elbows on the table, and ran his hands into his plentiful crop of fair hair.

"Oh, 'twas short and sweet. 'Things violent last not,' you know. My love was violent ; so was my adored. It was five years ago ; she was big and fair, and softly sweet. I was twenty-one, three years younger than she and her willing slave, as pliable as warm putty. I thought I could die for her ; but when the dear old governor took ill, and his reason was tot-

tering and no one but I could balance it, as it were, I found myself between two fires. Either my father or my fair Dulcinea must be given up; with her the parting would be temporary, but with my poor father it would be a last farewell, as his malady was beyond cure. When I told her I must go to Cotsmore, she flew in a passion—a perfect fury—and said I must not leave New York—you know my father was at our country house up the Hudson—if I did she would have nothing more to do with me; I must not go! The season had just begun, and I was counted upon as her escort. I spoke of an immediate marriage, and we could both go and cheer and nurse the dear old father; she darted a look of murder at me, and said such bitter words. I asked her to decide what I should do. She counted on my former meekness and slavery, and early the next morning sent me a note saying: If I left New York she would not see me again; if I preferred my father to her I might go, and forever; I left for Cotsmore, and telegraphed to her from the next station that I was on my way to my father. Farewell. So ended my dream of young love. Quite a pretty story, isn't it?" said Hamilton.

"Left no scar, eh?" asked Curtis.

"Not a trace! Since then I have woo'd and almost wedded art. 'Some day I may win fame.'"

"A truce to your art and fame. Why do you want to leave such a fair land as this? There is no

country in the world where such pleasure can be had. The glorious climate, the genial men, and lovely women! Why, there are no women in the world to compare to ours in beauty and intelligence—and in goodness, too, I guess,” said Curtis.

“You are a better judge than I. To me they will always be a puzzle—one of the mysteries.”

“Mysteries! Ah, yes, I really will acknowledge woman a mystery—about the only one science cannot fathom. You don't think there are any others beyond the reach of science, do you?”

He turned a quick glance at Vane. There was a slight curl of scorn on Hamilton's lips, but, with a pleasant and half amused smile, he replied:

“Of course I do; mysteries in nature since the world began, and as great and unfathomable now as at the creation.”

In surprise, Curtis replied:

“You seem a little off, Hamilton. Where's your broad intelligence? What is a mystery in nature?”

Vane Hamilton gave an amused little laugh as he thought of the righteous claim Curtis might lay to the long ears of a certain animal of the equine family. but he quietly replied:

“Why, the milk in the cocoa-nut, two flowers on one stem of different colors—perhaps different shape; to me, the sweet pea is a study,

“With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white.”

"Who can tell how the deep purple, pure white and delicate pink became so harmoniously mingled upon the same small bud, and the pungent delicious fragrance added? And here, look at this," as he broke an almond apart, finding two kernels inside. "How came this one to be double? No, no, science will never solve such mysteries. I am fond of the mysterious—of Hermann and the black art even—but the study of a blade of grass is as great a secret as the land beyond the sky, where the little child who has passed into it is wiser than the greatest scholar living."

There was a pause, and then Curtis said :

"Well, by Jove, Hamilton, I have never thought about such things. I buy a bunch of flowers, take a thoughtless sniff of their perfume, and pass them on to some girl, and that is the end of it, unless I say to myself, 'well, old fellow, there goes another V. or X. Sometimes it is both with an E between them. Now that you are opening my eyes to what an ignoramus I am, I'm more sorry than ever to have you go.'" Then resuming his gay off-hand manner, he continued : "Well, if you don't distinguish yourself in art, the least you can do is to bring home a live duchess, and show those blooming English duffers who carry off so many of our fine women, that you can turn the tables on them."

He gave a gay laugh as Vane replied :

"And slight the fair, intelligent, and perhaps—as you say—good women of New York. What are you thinking about?" and Hamilton echoed the laugh.

"Oh, well, be happy, and God speed you on your way," said Curtis, as he rose to go, putting out his hand to Hamilton.

The latter held it while he said: "Good bye, old fellow; spend your time while I'm gone solving mysteries which science has no power over—the meaning of a woman's glance; the inrush of a pleasing emotion; the outflow of mingled thoughts; the why of an unbidden hope; the coloring of the sea shells and pebbles. The—well—the milk in the cocoa-nut! Oh, you'll find plenty to think about besides the bright eyes and soft voices of lovely women. Ta! Ta!" and they parted. Hamilton feeling better for the gaiety of Curtis's manner, and Curtis the better of Vane's common sense, and having something besides horse-racing and questionable amusements to think about.

CHAPTER II.

TWENTY years before my story opened, Hudson Hamilton's fair young wife died in giving birth to a daughter; leaving three young children. Vane, just six and Clarice four years of age, were both pretty,

winsome children, but the infant, for whom the lovely young mother rendered up her precious life, was a plain, timid, shrinking child, who, before she could reason, seemed to feel herself a living reproach.

She cost her father so much of love, and happiness, and life that he would not look at the child for months, and then when he could no longer miss seeing her sometimes, he never gave her more than passing notice, while he lavished all his affections on the two elder children.

Little Naomi was given to the care of a colored nurse, who was kind to the child and fond of her, and, until she was twelve years old, most of her time was spent with her nurse, even after she had begun to take lessons from a daily governess.

Clarice at sixteen was the image of what her beautiful mother had been at that age, and her increasing likeness to Helen Vane made Hudson Hamilton more than worship the child of his dead love. Vane was his right hand, and father and son were the world to each other.

Poor little Naomi adored both Clarice and Vane, and to the sad little sister they were surreptitiously kind, for they knew the father never forgave her the sacrifice of their mother.

When Clarice was eighteen she was to be married to one of whom father and brother approved, one whom she dearly loved.

The engagement had been announced, the wedding day set, and a bright future in sight; a brilliant match and a happy life were in store for Clarice Hamilton and Oscar Rivers, when the hand of a mightier than man was raised to order otherwise.

A grand ball was given in honor of the girl who was soon to be a bride, at which Clarice caught cold, and on the day when she was to be wedded she died. Hudson Hamilton was completely unmanned. Deeper sorrow was never known than that which hung in a thick black cloud over that lovely home. Vane was full of anxiety for his father as well as of grief at the loss of his dearly loved sister. No one seemed to think of poor Naomi, whose heart was broken. She went about silently, with colorless cheeks and lips and dry eyes—an image of mute despair—until after the funeral.

When all was over and the body taken from her, she sank down in a dead swoon in the darkened drawing-room, on the very spot where the coffin of Clarice had rested, and never recovered consciousness until she lay dying two weeks afterwards; then she pressed Vane's hand, saying, in a faint whisper:

“My heart is broken, Vane. Ask Papa to forgive me for living this long, for ever having lived at all.”

Death closed her eyes upon a world that to her young life had but rarely brought happiness. After death there came over her features the smile that

Clarice had in life when in her happiest moods; the only time she had ever the least look of her sister.

When Hudson Hamilton saw that look of Clarice, he was seized with remorse, and loaded himself with self-reproach. He had not known this child in life, as it were, and now to find there was in her a trace of his dead wife and Clarice drove him frantic. Vane would not tell his father of Naomi's dying message; it would have killed him.

Hudson Hamilton saw Vane's pale cheeks and sunken eyes, and, fearing another calamity might befall him in the loss of his son, made him take rooms in New York, while he closed their city house and retired to Cotsmore on the banks of the Hudson.

Vane was given *carte blanche* to draw what money he wanted, and told to enjoy himself as much as he could; that the moment his father wanted him he would be sent for. The sad young heir to a million proved an easy prey to the designing fortune-hunter; for Madge Warlock, who was the veteran of four seasons, was just such a belle as to make a lad of twenty-one proud of so great a conquest.

Each Sunday he spent with his father who was aging fast; his memory was going; his thoughts were wandering, and his hair bleaching; but he would not let Vane remain with him, nor would he return to New York with his son.

Vane was not idle in New York; he was spending

his days in a neat little studio attached to his apartments, and his evenings were devoted to Madge.

About three months' time was spent in this way, when the telegram came from his father's valet calling him home to Cotsmore. His father's mind was on the wrong side of the balance, Vane could plainly see, and his health was fast failing.

Hudson Hamilton was a man of strong fibre, and with breaking heart, tottering mind and weakening body he fought for four years against the avenger Death, with his good and loyal son ever at his side to cheer his rational moments and soothe his obscure ones.

At last the fatal blow fell, and Vane was left alone in the world.

The days of his deepest sorrow, the moments of his wildest despair, the time of his stony anguish had to be borne alone. Even Madge's selfish regard and false smiles would have been a solace in his woe. There was no one whom he had gathered to himself in love, in these years spent in caring for his father; no woman to give sweet and gentle sympathy. There was the true salt of men's regret, but not the balm of woman's gentle pathos.

CHAPTER III.

THE feelings with which one enters Rome are different from those with which any other city is approached.

What a tumult fills the breast as one nears the Eternal City! It seems like an ecstasy—a plunge into bewilderment. Oh, how strange and yet how familiar it is to those who, from childhood, have pored over the pictured scenes of the city set upon seven hills—the Coliseum, the Forums, the Capitol and St. Peter's! Ah! St. Peter's, the vast, the beautiful, the grand! One expects to see its dome rising to the sky, but in that disappointment awaits the visitor; for so large and outspreading is the dome of St. Peter's, that it looks from the distance as though it were the dome of the whole city. 'Tis only when one enters the glorious Basilica that its magnificence is understood, and usually St. Peter's is the first monument of the great city to which the stranger is attracted.

But Vane Hamilton had a strange feeling about the Cathedral, and left it until almost the last. He wanted the feeling of Rome to take full possession of him before he passed the portals of its grandest edifice.

He wandered through the Forums ; scanned every nook of the Palatine, letting his imagination run wild in picturing the life of the Cæsars, the tragedies, romances and comedies of their day, the exquisite refinement of their revenge. A certain Roman empress wept when she heard the eloquent pleadings of an innocent man before the tribunal of the Emperor, but whispered to the Emperor not to let the prisoner escape with his life for she wanted his land. One banquets a rival, and when the feast is in its highest flood of pleasure, the gentle shower of violets and roses begins to fall, and continues until the rival is smothered to death.

These scenes come to one's mind when the spot is visited.

Then that strange Campagna, with an outline as level as the sea, and its carpet of brown earth so soft and fine that a peasant's cart-wheels, moving over it, fill the space between earth and sky with a dun colored cloud of dust!

The first Sunday Vane spent in Rome he went to the Pincio to hear the band play and see the beauty of the town. All were strangers to him, but nevertheless he followed the motley crowd to hear the singing of the nuns in the Trinità de' Monti.

Those sweet, sad, despairing voices—how memory recalls every note!

The singing over, Vane Hamilton returned to his hotel, saying to himself:

"To-morrow I shall go to St. Peter's—what can it be that drags me there and then holds me back? I can't understand this conflict of emotions. I'd really be ashamed to tell anyone I've been so long in Rome and so often to the Coliseum and never to St. Peter's. My fate must be awaiting me there."

He had already obtained permission to copy a Guido in the Villa Borghese, and had not seen the interior of St. Peter's.

Next day, as Vane Hamilton passed through the noble court with its splashing fountains, and reached the wide flight of steps in front of the Basilica, he turned his back upon the entrance, and looked down the grand approach to the church. The half-circles of columns on either side, with the fountains flashing in the sunbeams, gave him a thrill of delight, and as he turned again to enter the church, he involuntarily for an instant bent his knee upon the top step and bowed his head.

He rose and walked quickly to the right. Lifting the heavy padded curtain he entered, and moving to the centre, stood looking in awe and wonder about him, a wonder that increases with each visit, an awe that grows upon one. Then he said to himself: "St. Peter's at last!"

Silently he made a circle of the great edifice, looking up into the mighty dome, and at the figures of gigantic size which by their great height are dimin-

ished, so that the pen in the hand of St. Luke, which is seven feet long, looks of ordinary size. The cupola is magnificent, enchanting, soul-expanding, and reveals the sublimity of the immortal architect, who was great for any age. Vane started at the left from the entrance, and paused at each of the chapels, monuments and statues—those chapels which would serve as independent churches, so large and splendid are they. Even their magnitude does not make one realize the full extent of the great Basilica. One must look at an ordinary human creature, standing alone in one of the vast aisles or in proximity to statue or monument, to realize the amplitude of the whole.

Vane was enchanted. "My daily walk must be here," said he, as he came upon the bronze statue of St. Peter, set upon a pedestal so high that only a woman of good height can reach to kiss the toe, now reduced to a mere scale from the touch of generations of devotees.

At sight of this, Vane revolted and wondered that such a figure could excite so much devotion. He recalled almost with incredulity that, at sight of it, a celebrated divine had been moved to tears that, as he said, had rolled down his cheeks "like rain from heaven."

On the day of the Jubilee of Pius IX. this statue was attired in full rich Pontifical robes,—a ghastly

sight, one would think—and the toe was kissed by thousands and tens of thousands.

Being an artist, Vane enjoyed most the fine mosaics—that of the Transfiguration from Raphael, having occupied ten men for nine years.

In the Baptistery, which is the last chapel on the left, is the mosaic of the Baptism of our Saviour by Maratta. This seemed to have a particular charm for Vane, and he looked long and earnestly at it. He had yet to see the glorious painting from which it is copied—and which is in the church of St. Maria degli Angeli.

The next day he paid another visit to St. Peter's. He did not go near the bronze Pope this time but followed the handsome English Cardinal, who was holding service from chapel to chapel, and looked in amazement upon the ceremony of constant robing and disrobing, wondering at the same time what the Cardinal thought of it himself. He fancied he was not the only one who understood not a word of the Latin service, intoned in the deep rich voice of the fine soldierly Cardinal. Understanding it or not, the sound of that splendid voice was a pleasure to him, and the sight of that majestic divine a delight to an artist's eye.

When the office was over, Vane took a glance around, and found himself again before the Maratta. He had stood but a moment looking at the picture,

when a little hunchback came up close to him, took a look at the picture with a pair of small, bright, bead-like eyes, then turned and walked back to a marble font a few yards off, and stooping down, kissed the stones near it, and then the pedestal above the sacred spot of his devotion. When Vane saw this, he said to himself, "That ugly, old bronze St. Peter hasn't it all his own way after all."

The Cathedral looked deserted, as Vane passed out. A sudden thought induced him to return and see if it really was so. He went to the right and nearing the bronze Pope mentally greeted him with "I like you better now, old man, seeing that there's something to share with you the devotee's caresses." Then continuing his way, he came upon a chapel with at least three hundred people witnessing vesper service. He concluded it must be true, as he had often heard, that "ten thousand soldiers could be scattered about St. Peter's and not seen." On Wednesday he kept away, but Thursday an irresistible impulse seized him to go again, and at half-past four in the afternoon he was standing at the right of the high altar from the door—the left to one looking down from the altar. On the opposite side was the figure of a kneeling girl,—apparently, from her dress, a peasant. On her head was a white lace mantilla, tied loosely under her chin like a small shawl or kerchief, such as is worn by the native women. At the back of this kneeling girl

stood an American woman with the corner of the lace in her ungloved hand. Vane saw visions of a peasant weeping over the mutilation of her proud handiwork, and thinking of the relic-hunting propensities of his countrywomen, determined to save this unconscious girl some tears.

As he passed round to the group he was watching, he thought of the tale he had heard of the mutilation of the drapery about the bed of Mary, Queen of Scots. The rings he had seen with settings of granite or red marble, hacked from the supposed tomb of Juliet at Verona, and, worse than all, the oft beheading of Washington at Westminster Abbey.

As he passed near the kneeling girl, his shadow fell in front of her, and she raised her head. Such a vision of sweet young loveliness! When her eyes met Vane's, an electric thrill of delight filled his whole being. Then, as if by magic, the little hunchback, whom he had watched with idle curiosity two days before, appeared and placed himself between Vane and the kneeling figure. Vane was brought back to earth by the look of scorn shot at him from those beady, rat-like eyes, and felt compelled to move away.

Instinct seemed to lead him to his favorite picture, and there he found the lady who looked so longingly at the lace. He was curious about the girl, and wished to hear what this American lady would say about her. They stood looking at the picture, Vane still

thinking of the Italian girl, when the lady impulsively exclaimed :

"Lovely! Perfectly beautiful!"

He replied as if the words had implied a question to him :

"Yes, very lovely."

"Oh! Ah! I didn't mean——" faltered she.

"Pardon me, Madam; I meant no offence. The air of this place seems so like Heaven that one forgets one is not where more ceremony is required."

"You are an American, I believe?"

"Yes, Madam."

"Well, I'm Mrs. Martin from Washington. My husband and son are with me at the Hotel Bristol. They have put *their* foot down on pictures and churches, and I had to come here alone to-day."

"You saw more than pictures and a church to interest you to-day, did you not? That girl whose lace you admired so much had lovely eyes."

"Oh! had she? I didn't see her eyes;" and, as she flashed a quick glance at Vane's fine orbs, she continued: "One can see lovely eyes every day, but such lace is the heirloom of a Royal house. Yet I'm sure she is only one of the people, and I hope she came by that lace honestly."

"She certainly would not be wearing it so openly if she had not the right to do so," said Vane, feeling nettled, he knew not why. Then he continued :

"Is it really very fine?"

"Very fine! Why it's that exquisite Venetian point. The art of making it has been lost for years and years—perhaps a hundred thousand or so. Here I am talking to you all this time and don't even know your name. Isn't it funny how people fraternize away from home?" said she.

"I am Vane Hamilton, of New York."

"I hope I won't forget. I never remember any one of New York but 'Mr. Barnes,'" and she laughed.

"That you may not forget me, I give you my card, Mrs. Martin. You'll remember me now, won't you?"

"Yes, unless I lose your card. Oh, dear! I must go now. Good-bye."

Vane followed Mrs. Martin from the Baptistery and was turning towards the high altar when he observed the girl with the lace mantilla, and her strange companion, the hunchback, going in the direction of the Baptistery. He moved away that he might watch them unobserved. She went straight to the font and rested against it while she looked earnestly at the picture of our Saviour's baptism. She stood upon the very spot her companion had kissed, and while she gazed upon the picture before her the hunchback gazed upon her. At last she turned to him, and touching his bushy, dark hair, said in a kind, gentle voice: "Buono Beppo."

At the touch he turned to her with the look of a

helpless pleased infant, and seizing her hand he kissed it passionately.

As Vane saw them moving down the aisle towards the exit, he hastened on and, going outside, watched for them; but if they came he did not see them. How could they have escaped him? He could not remember being off guard as it were, and now the closing hour had come and he had, with all his vigilance, missed seeing again this unknown creature who had aroused such a strange interest and curiosity in him.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Vane reached the Piazza di Spagna on his way to his hotel—a point he usually gained from any direction in the late afternoon—he saw an old lady in one of the small, single cabs common to the place, whom he had noticed frequently at the *table d'hôte* at his hotel. Somehow he fancied she was a character in her way from the suppressed laughter which seemed to surround her end of the table. She had with her a son—who looked no more than twenty years old—and his fair young bride. This young couple seemed callously indifferent to their surroundings. The bride was always languid and tired; the bridegroom either smoking cigarettes or walking in the Corso or

Via Nazionale. The mother was ever alert, not that she appreciated her surroundings more than her children, but she wanted to buy things, that she might say she got them in Rome.

She had usually for guide an American priest, and with him she visited jewelers, silk vendors and picture dealers. They spent much time in the reception-room of the hotel in close conversation, and it was naturally concluded that Mrs. Norman was of her companion's faith, and had come to Rome on some religious mission. But such was not the case. Mrs. Norman had crossed the Atlantic in the sameship with Father Lauder, and he made but little headway in converting her, for her mind was more centred on things mundane than spiritual. She was, however, diplomatic enough to listen with evident interest to all he had to say, as she cherished the ambition of being presented to the Pope, which had now become a rarer privilege than in former years.

Vane wandered aimlessly about the Piazza, taking no note of time, until at last he was awakened to the fact that he was almost alone. Taking a look at his watch, he exclaimed :

"A quarter-past seven and a good twenty minutes' walk to the hotel! What have I been thinking about?"

Aye, what, indeed? A pair of brown eyes peering out at him from every window he looked in,

looking up at him from the waters of the fountain, gazing down at him from the column and the figures at its base. He was haunted, in fact, by those soft, liquid, beaming eyes.

He walked on, up the Piazza steps, along the Via Sistina, then to the Via Nazionale and the Quirinale Hotel, and before the door stood the cab with Mrs. Norman looking about her in a dazed kind of way. As soon as she caught sight of Vane, she said to him with a flurried manner ;

“ Ain’t this *our* hotel, mister ? ”

Vane assisted her to alight, saying, “ Yes, Madam, it is. You have had a long drive. I saw you in the Piazza di Spagna two hours ago.”

“ Law sakes ! ” with a gasp, “ I guess I have, but I’m here now, thank goodness.”

When she was sure she was safe on the ground—for she stamped one foot after another on the pavement—she opened a little hand-bag she was carrying and taking a handful of silver from it, she held it out to the driver to help himself.

Vane gently placed his hand in front of the silver and asked the driver some questions which Mrs. Norman did not seem to understand ; then turning to her, he said :

“ How much were you to pay this man ? ”

“ Pay him ! why, I’ve done nothin’ but pay him all day, it seems to me.”

Vane then turned to the man and said :

“Come here to-morrow morning at nine, and tell me how much this lady has paid you, and I will settle with you.”

The cabby drove off and 'tis needless to say did not return.

In the vestibule of the hotel, young Norman met his mother with frowns and censure. The *table d'hôte* dinner was over, but at the end of one of the long tables, covers were laid for four, and when Vane reached the dining-room, the Normans had just sat down.

Mrs. Norman, senior, was flushed and still excited, and Vane noticed what a pretty woman she was still though a matron of fifty years or more. She had delicate features and good eyes, with a kind, sympathetic expression.

She greeted Vane with a smile, saying :

“I'd like to know your name, you was so good to me to-night.”

Vane smilingly gave his name, remarking, “One good turn deserves another, so I must have your name.”

“Certainly ; my name is Mrs. Norman, and this is my son, Jonathan, and his wife, Marthy.”

The son frowned and said, in a querulous tone, “Mother, why do you persist in calling me Jonathan ; why don't you call me Jack ?”

“Oh, I allus forget ; well now, Jona—no, Jack,

—well Jonathan, why don't you bow to Mr. Hamilton, didn't I introduce you proper?"

Then Jonathan remembered his manners, and gave the usual greeting, also thanking Vane for his kindness to his mother. Marthy merely bowed.

Vane felt, as he looked at that effeminate, dudish, undergrown young man, what an affliction his name must be. Jonathan's hair was light brown, and parted down the centre; he had light blue eyes, delicate, womanish hands, white and small, and on the third finger of the left hand he wore a large seal ring. Martha was a pretty, fair, delicate little creature of perhaps eighteen years of age, with an amiable, languid expression.

As soon as the introduction was over, Mrs. Norman said, turning to her son:

"Johna—Jack," and she smiled over at Vane, "I went to the Fattykin to see about that sick-office—you know I said I would." She meant sarcophagus.

Jonathan, who always carried a frown on his face, looked daggers at his mother, and giving himself a nervous, impatient twist in his chair, he exclaimed:

"Now, for heaven's sake, what did you do that for?"

"Wall, I wanted to be satisfied about the thing. When I got all the way up them long steps with the queerest rigged-out soldiers in green and yallar, I thought the Pope was havin' a circus, but I see other folks goin' up, so I jess follered. Thinks I to myself,

I'll do jess what they does and I'll get along all right. When we got to the gate-keeper, I took out that ticket Father Lauder give me and handed it to him, and I got in without any bother.

I see lots of sickoffices there, but there warn't one so fine as Boneyparte's. I see a man who has something to say to every one most, so I jess asked him how much he thought one would cost, and he said he'd find out. I guess he was English. He come back and said the Pope wouldn't sell none of them—then asked me if I wanted to see or know anything more, and I said no, for I somehow didn't like him. Then he said I must pay him five francs."

"No wonder," said Jonathan, "anyone who wanted to buy anything from the Vatican ought to be made to pay for thinking they could do it."

"Do you think I couldn't buy all them old things if I wanted to?" said Mrs. Norman with spirit.

"No you couldn't, nor all the Government of the whole United States couldn't buy 'em," said Jonathan, with an air of superiority.

Vane was more amused than he dare allow his face to disclose.

All his sympathy was with Mrs. Norman, and he could not bear to see her so sat upon.

They were all silent for some time; then vounge Mrs. Norman whispered something to Jonathan and the two young people left the room, leaving Mrs.

Norman and Vane alone. When the door was closed upon them, Mrs. Norman gave vent to her pent up feelings.

"Law sakes! what a dreadful thing larnin' is for some folks! Jonathan aint been no sort o' comfort to me since I tole him if he would only pass right through college—Harvard—he need never do a stroke of work or earn a penny, cause I'd have enough fur us all, and he ain't done nothing but look glum ever sense. He was in love with Marthy Hollins, and I said 'marry her,' thinkin' he'd brighten up, but he hain't. I dursn't tell them about the time I had to-day, but I'll tell you. Shall I tell you?"

"Of course, if it's no secret," said Vane, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"'Taint no secret, course not—but Jonathan won't let me talk no more nor his father did, but his father didn't shut me up glum," and tears came to her eyes and in her voice. "No, his father jess said to me when we was out together, 'Now, Sebiney, all you has to do is to look pretty, no one can be more so, and like a good little woman, don't offer any remarks;' and then he would come to me at times and tell me I was the beauty of the party. That's not the way Jonathan does," and she wiped a falling tear as she continued: "My father had a large timber farm in Illynoy, and I was the only child left when Henry Norman came to teach school near our farm and part

of the time boarded with us. We was hard workin' folks, but every one said I was a purty gal," and she blushed as she said it. "Henry fell in love with me right off, and nothin' would do but we must get married. When my father died we went to live in Springfield, and Henry had a good school there; he tried to learn me something too, but there was no use. I couldn't go to school, and jess when he was a givin' me a lesson the baby would cry, or I'd have to set bread, or do somethin', then he quit and said. 'you are a good, nice, pretty woman, Sebiney, and if you don't talk people won't know you had no education.' Soon people came round wantin' to buy them timber lands, and Henry sold them for seven hundred thousand dollars and started a bank in St. Louis. There we was the top of the heap! Henry he's been here lots of times, and allus wanted to bring me, but jess then I couldn't leave the children, and I've only got two left. Mary Jane she married Kunnel Hoopaw, and he's jess as good and kind to me as he ken be. They was with us as far as Venus, but was afraid of Roman fever and didn't come on. Well now this ain't what I started out to tell you, was it?"

"I don't really know, Mrs. Norman; but it's all very interesting," replied Vane, giving her a kindly look and smiling at her.

"I wanted to tell you about to-day, and that cabby. Do you know, I couldn't remember this

hotel, we've been at so many ! He jabbered 'talian at me, or French, or some gibberish and I said 'hotel ! hotel !' and he didn't move ; then I tried to think and said Alleymanjay, I know that is the name of one, and didn't he drive me right to a saloon and two waiters came out and tried to make me go in, and I had to give them all some money before he would move. Then he turned to me and said 'alley,' and I said 'we,' and I believe we went to every hotel in Rome, and I had to pay at every one. Then I said to myself our hotel had a queer name, and the queer caught me, and when I said queer-in-alley he allied right up here and wanted more money. If it hadn't been for the Pope and the Fattykin I wouldn't a' knowd where I was."

She seemed now to see the comical side and laughed over her adventures, and Vane laughed with her ; then he asked her what pleased her most in Rome.

"I 'spose St. Peter's Church, but I only want to have it to say that I was presented to the Pope. Then I'm ready to leave this musty old place. I 'spect it jess suited Henry, 'cause I'm sure he know'd all about everything. He took home lots of arts ; he got a little Sammy, a kneelin one, nicer'n that one in the Fattykin and a Venice do Meddysshoes, that is like day before night, side of the grand one I seen in Italy ; why this'n is all patched and mended up. Henry used to say, ' Well, Sabiney, if you don't 'pre-

ciate art for it's own sake, you know how to take care of them things'; for I wouldn't let dust and dirt stay on any of his statoos."

Hamilton could only listen and feel amused, and when they rose from their seats, he noticed what a handsome figure, in a well-fitting dress, Mrs. Norman had, and with an excited flush in her healthful cheeks, she was still a pretty woman. She turned to him and said, "Be you goin' to stay long here?"

"I cannot tell—indefinitely; I am an artist and came here to paint."

"Do tell! Well, when you want to sell a picture, just let me know, and I'm on hand to buy it. You've been so kind to me, I'd like to have one of your paintings."

Vane thanked her as he said good-night, and thought with a smile and an inwardly satisfied feeling, that all the world was not selfish or ungrateful, for here was this woman expressing gratitude for a slight act of politeness, and notwithstanding her want of education, what tact she exhibited in her way of offering assistance, for she evidently thought he was a struggling artist.

CHAPTER V.

As early as people were admitted, Vane was at the Villa Borghese next morning, and set earnestly to work copying a Guido—a portrait of a Borghese.

Suddenly, as though a strange thought had struck him, he threw his brush impatiently from him, saying to himself, "I call myself an artist and come here to copy! I am no artist, if I cannot conceive and work to perfection an ideal picture. I may not be a Guido Reni to paint many styles, but I shall paint a Vane Hamilton picture. Ha! ha!! I astonish the world—a good joke," and he laughed aloud, forgetting where he was. His laugh echoed through the empty rooms, and brought the attendant in wonder to his side. Vane looked up at the shivering old man, who was twisting his little skull cap round and round on his bald head, as if to warm it; and seeing the look of wonder and enquiry on his face, Vane pointed to what he had sketched and laughed again. The old man thought the joke lay somewhere about the picture, so nodded his head as if he understood all and passed on.

"This poor old Borghese must go on to comple-

tion ; then I must distinguish myself," said Vane, as he plied the brush industriously. When he came to the eyes with their straight brows and oval shape, set even with the surface of the cheek, he stopped.

"I cannot go those eyes," he said, and he outlined a round full eye, with arched brows and drooping full fringed eyelids.

Loungers and painters began to come in. These in couples would look at the copy, then at Vane, nudge each other, and smilingly pass on. Artists would see the copy, then the study, give a knowing whistle and go to their own work. Vane, unconscious of this silent criticism, put his whole soul into the work, nor stopped until he had brightened the head of an old Borghese prince with the eyes of the girl he had seen at St. Peter's. Then somewhat after the manner of Michel Angelo, when he had completed his great statue of Moses, in Rome, and his no less remarkable one of David in Florence, whom he bade speak, Vane said to those eyes :

"Turn your gaze on me, and me alone."

"Those eyes whose light seem'd rather given
To be adored than to adore—
Such eyes as may have look'd from Heaven,
But ne'er were raised to it before."

When he had finished painting *her* eyes, the interest in his work was gone. "I cannot touch that canvas again to-day," he said, and he put away all his painting materials and walked through the rooms, watching the other painters.

Those who had passed him at his work looked up at him with a knowing smile. "How genial," he thought, "these brother artists are becoming; it is all owing to this genial southern climate," for they were mostly Italians and Romans.

On the two occasions when he had seen the hunchback at St. Peter's, it was about the hour of four, and as he was evidently the companion of his unknown enchantress, Vane resolved to wait until that hour, then go again to the Basilica. How long the time would seem until then!

He shook himself together as it were, for he felt that there was something wrong. ;

"A man of my age to come to Rome with a settled purpose—Rome, the place I have longed to see, where every foot of earth is classic ground, and allow a pair of beautiful eyes in the face of a pretty peasant girl, whose lover perhaps is that hideous little hunchback, to disturb my reason in this way! Be a man, Vane Hamilton; not an ass, as Curtis might now say," said he to himself, as he left the Villa Borghese to make his way to the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, which is now a gallery of very large pictures; most of them from St. Peter's where their places have been filled by Mosaic copies.

Here he looked with a special interest on the Saviour's Baptism by Maratta.

Vane walked through this magnificent church, so

lofty, light and clean—kept so, probably, by the Carthusian monks,—with its high columns of ancient Egyptian granite and the meridian line across its marble floor, put there nearly two centuries ago.

One finds in nearly every Roman church some legend to doubt the truth of, and here one meets the astonishing story of Cardinal Albergati, who turned *bread into coal* to convince the German Emperor he had divine authority. Would that some cardinal to-day had power to turn something less valuable than bread into coal!

In the Santa Maria degli Angeli there is the chapel of Beato Niccolo Albergati.

The cloisters here were designed by Michel Angelo, who also planted the cypress trees about them.

In Rome, no matter where one turns, one meets with remarkable art treasures, which are the work of the indefatigably industrious and artistic hand, the emanation of the mighty mind, of the immortal Michel Angelo—equally renowned for architecture, painting and statuary.

Why Vane visited the Santa Maria degli Angeli this morning, only his own disturbed mind could tell. At high noon, he found himself once more in the Basilica, first at the high altar, then at the Baptistry. For a moment he let all thoughts of the image that haunted him vanish from his mind.

The sentiment of the grandeur surrounding him

took possession of him, and again he was filled with the enthusiasm that marked his first visit. With an artist's appreciation of the beautiful, he found his enthusiasm increased rather than (as in his last visit he had been tempted to think) diminished. One of the wonders of the world, he felt it was so grand, so sublime, that it appealed to every virtuous sense. Here the penitent came for forgiveness, the sorrowing for comfort, the happy for enhanced pleasure, the painter, the sculptor, and the scholar for inspiration and food for thought. Light, beauty and richness of color met the eye on every side in the mighty fabric. Could anything be grander or more sublime? Still in the Eternal City, St. Peter's is not the only wonder. The very dust we stir up under our feet is turning a page in a history which is crowded with remarkable events, for underneath our feet are ever crumbling the remains of wondrous treasures of art—the very dust that is floating in the air is the wearing out of some splendid monument of man's handiwork, wrought, perhaps, to honor some pagan god, or some god-like pagan. Those wonders are ever appearing to the seeing eye.*

We left Vane contemplating his surroundings with

* In 1882 was witnessed the exhuming of the walls of a large hall in connection with the Baths of Agrippa, where a frieze of excellent work and in good preservation was found, with columns and other remains. These were almost, if not quite, under the Pantheon, which was erected, B. C. 26 : but was consecrated as a Christian church early in the seventh century. It is, therefore, reasonable to believe that the temple underneath had been forgotten at the time of the building of the Pantheon.

an awe and admiration felt only within those sacred walls. The fascination of the glorious whole had taken resistless hold of his senses.

While he stood wrapt in thoughts that were soaring upwards, he was brought to earth by the exclamation of one of a group of passers-by.

"I declare! it's two now, and we have only one hour to see all this big place!" said the voice.

"Here," thought Vane, "is some one wanting to prolong time, while I am wishing to hasten it."

He looked at his watch, and learning the time, decided to spend the next two hours in the Vatican. He ascended the Scala Regia and went direct to the Sistine Chapel.

"How indescribable is this, the most perfect of Angelo's work," said Vane to himself. "Can it be that those cornices and columns are only painted and those figures not living human creatures, revealing the emotions of their hearts in their faces; the grief, the despair, the rage of the condemned; the relief from dread and suspense; the gratitude, the transport of the pardoned? How sublime!" and he drew a long breath. "Ah! my friend, Michel Angelo, your life was too full of hard work for sentiment, or your figures of women and children would not *all* have been so muscular and heavy-limbed. The world and I forgive you, for where you fail to be beautiful you are grand! No woman's love has been at work with your brush, or brought confusion to your brain."

He stood now facing the door that he might watch the faces of the people entering, to decide if life could better portray expression than the frescoes of the great artist.

They came in groups, then couples, then singly. The strong-minded maiden of uncertain age, noting with a long pencil in her Baedeker what interested her most ; the maiden neophyte and verdant youth, looking more at each other than anything else ; the rushing man who has only time for a hasty glance, but who expects to read it up when he gets home ; and the eccentric old-fashioned English woman to be seen alone and everywhere, dowdily dressed in mawkish grey and pale blue, with many flounces and lace gew-gaws, and silver jewelry, often carrying with her a camp-stool, hand-bag, opera glasses, and knitted shawl, the whiteness of which, like her youth, has long departed.

CHAPTER VI.

AT four o'clock sharp Vane was back in St. Peter's, and going near the high altar, half concealed himself as he rested against the statue of St. Veronica to await the coming of his enchantress. About twenty minutes after four he saw her approach with her strange companion, the hunchback, who smiled up at one of the sweepers of the Basilica as he gently patted the dwarf upon the breast.

They approached the high altar and crossing themselves as they bowed, they reverently knelt and bent their heads in devout prayer.

As Vane looked upon them, that sweet vision of young loveliness and that youthful monster, he said to himself:

“If each of them is the antithesis of the other; they have, at least, a religion in common.”

He wondered if he could be induced to embrace their belief. He decided in the negative. Since he had come to Rome, he thought the city and the churches were dedicated rather to Popes than to God, and, like Martin Luther, he would leave it with less reverence for the Church than when he entered it.

Its miracles and legends were to him delightful fairy tales. He did not question the people's belief in them, but he recalled with assent the expressive shrug of the monk's shoulders when he was asked if he believed the story of the wooden doll finding its way back by night to the Chapel of the Manger. This hideous little wooden image, which is covered with jewels pinned to its clothing by admiring and believing pilgrims, is supposed to work miracles, has servants of its own and a carriage, and drives out in state; the passing peasants kneeling as it goes by.

Vane divided his thoughts between the kneeling girl and the bronze canopy resting on the gilded columns over the high altar, and wondered why the

Pantheon should have been robbed to make them. "But then," thought he, "'tis the same with all the churches here,—a game of give and take."

After twenty minutes of silent prayer, those two kneeling figures rose, and Vane, still unobserved by them, watched them as they passed quite close to him and went from one altar to another, kneeling but a moment at each—not speaking to each other—until again they reached the Baptistery, Here, as before, they lingered longest, then they moved up the aisle again.

"This time you shall not escape me, my sweet fairy, unless indeed you are a witch and melt into air," said Vane.

Just as they were nearing the altar of St. Mary, with Vane close behind them, for they came back to it, Mrs. Norman caught sight of Vane, and extending her hand, greeted him warmly, and introduced Father Lauder. It seemed but a moment, then Vane looked up again to find his bird had flown. He excused himself as quickly and gracefully as possible, and hastened outside. Not a sight of them could be seen in any direction.

Vane raged with disappointment and chagrin—disappointment that he could not trace the strange pair to their home, and find out more about the lovely girl who had so bewitched him—chagrin that he should be such a fool as to be enthralled by the

pretty face and graceful figure of a peasant. "But no, she is not a peasant," he said; "there is an in-born, high-bred dignity about that girl in spite of her dress—and that, if I am any judge, is rich in material, though picturesquely peasant-like in style." He walked on quickly to the bridge of St. Angelo, and took the most direct road to the Piazza di Spagna, saying as he went: "If I did not feel that girl was high-born, I should unhesitatingly approach her without all this premeditation." Then he continued: "What a day I have had trying to find out more about that girl! If I fail to-morrow, I shall give up and try to banish her from my mind."

When Vane reached the Via Condotti, as he was nearing the steps of the Piazza di Spagna, he heard the whirling dance music of the Tarantella.

It was a charming sight to see all the models in their quaint and picturesque costumes join in the mazy dance. Soon the excitement waxed high, and the passers-by joined the merry dancers; as one dropped out exhausted, another taking the place, the dance went gaily on.

One gray-headed old woman put down the basket from her head, and joined the giddy throng. Becoming heated with the exertion and excitement, she threw off first the kerchief from her head, then the shawl from her shoulders, and, with the grace and poetry of her motion, provoked cheers from the

crowd. She became wild with the cheers that greeted her. Seizing a tambourine from one of the models, she played upon it as she glided through the figures of the Tarantella, lifting the instrument above her head, and swaying with the grace of a swan.

At last she sank exhausted upon the steps, with the tambourine in her lap, her eyes sparkling, and her gray hair, which had loosened, falling about her face like a mist. Silver and copper began to drop into the tambourine until she had a goodly and well earned sum. She put all but a few coins in the pocket of her green-serge skirt; then, as she was returning the tambourine to the owner, she held it high above her head, rattling the coppers in it that all might know she was giving them too.

Vane almost hoped and greatly feared he might find his enslaver in this group. When he reached the scene, he carefully scanned every face and figure, to make sure that she was not of that motley crowd; then he entered with spirit into the enjoyment of the pleasant scene, and helped to cheer on the dancing of the old woman.

Like Dickens, Vane seemed to know nearly all the people personally who took part in that festive dance, and, indeed, every visitor to Rome recognizes at once the familiar faces and costumes of the models, who have served to beautify or mar canvas or chromo, from pictures worth hundreds of dollars to a cigarette card.

Like a shower in April, the rain is soon over, and so was the music and the dancing.

“How my heart misgave me, when I thought I might see her in that giddy throng. But, if I had, it would have cured me of this foolish passion. I can think of nothing but that lovely face, and she is ignorant of my very existence, unless she remembers that one look which pierced me to the heart, and for the moment set my brain on fire. Well, to-morrow will decide; if she escapes me, then I shall try no longer to find her. I will banish her from my mind. No! No! I never can! She fills all my thoughts; I cannot work, I cannot think; always the image of her sweet face is before me. Ah, Madge! you were kind to me. I thought, in my hot youth I loved you; but, my fair beauty, I never had one scintillation of the constant, deep passion I feel for this unknown girl. How kind you were to release me when you did!” was his mental ejaculation.

CHAPTER VII.

VANE wandered restlessly from one scene to another the morning after the Model's dance on the Scala di Spagna. No painting for him that day.

He found himself at the Sistine Chapel shortly after noon ; the day being a brilliant one, there was still a morning light in the chapel ; the hour was one which may be called between the acts ; for he was there alone with one drowsy custodian, who sat with his head almost between his knees, on a camp chair near the door.

Vane came to have another look at Michel Angelo's wonderful fresco.

An anecdote may not be amiss here ; first I quote from Eaton's Rome :

"It may be fanciful, but it seems to me that in this, and in every other of Michel Angelo's works, you may see that the ideas, beauties and particular excellences of statuary were ever present to his mind ; that they are the conceptions of a sculptor embodied in painting.

"St. Catherine, in a green gown, and somebody else in a blue one, are supremely hideous. Paul IV in an unfortunate fit of prudery, was seized with the resolution of whitewashing over the whole of the Last Judgment, in order to cover the scandal of a few naked female figures.

"With difficulty he was prevented from utterly destroying the grandest painting in the world, but could not be dissuaded from ordering these poor women to be clothed in this most unbecoming drapery. Danile de Volterra, whom he employed in this office (in the life-time of Michel Angelo), received in consequence the name of Il Braghettoni (the breeches-maker)."

Michel Angelo avenged himself upon the master of ceremonies, or whoever it was who suggested this idea to the Pope, by painting him in hell, as Midas, with ass's ears. When he wanted himself *white-washed* out of hell, the Pope sarcastically replied :

"I might have released you from purgatory ; but over hell I have no power."

How deliciously sweet is such revenge ; like ripened fruit, whose very lusciousness causes it to fall from the tree. Oh ! the power of the caricaturist's pencil ! A celebrated anecdote is told in Brussels of the eccentric painter Wiertz, who made a portrait of a reigning beauty. When the portrait was finished the lady refused to take it, or pay for it, saying it was not in the least like her.

"Very well, Madam ; as you like."

The artist then set to work and painted around that face a prison window, and across the face iron prison bars, and over it the words "Petits-Carmes," the name of the Brussels' Prison, and placed it in a conspicuous window in Montagne de la Cour. It is needless to say the first price asked was paid after that.

Vane was restless and impatient, and could not fix his attention upon any of the great works before him. He left the chapel and went to the gallery of modern pictures—the feeling of unrest still upon him—he felt inclined to find fault with everything—even Michel Angelo did not seem to him so glorious a

genius as hitherto. Why did the sun shine so provokingly bright to-day, while he was uncertain about seeing his fair enchantress: he was at variance with the very elements, with all the world.

"To-day will seal my fate; to-day I shall know what manner of woman this is who has so enslaved me," he resolved.

He wandered from one great picture to another, with the heedless and unknowing air of an unappreciative tourist, only bound to put in so much time; nothing touched a responsive chord in his sympathetic nature; he could only see before him a sweet young girl, standing within the golden circle of youth, with the glorious light of brilliant beauty surrounding her.

At last the hour of four had come. Vane left the Vatican. Going down by the Scala Regia, he made a circle of the outside of the Basilica, then entered. He placed himself close against the monument of Maria Clementina Sobieski (who was wife of Charles Edward, the young pretender), and stood facing the west. He had only reached this spot when he took out his watch to see the time; he was but an instant in doing so, and when he raised his eyes again, *she* and her hunchback companion were close beside him.

"Evidently they have come here earlier than usual to-day," thought Vane, as he saw them cross straight

in front of him. He watched until he saw them go up the centre aisle, then he headed them off, going quickly up the left, and looking back at them from different points of observation.

He saw the look of admiration—nay—adoration!—with which the little monster regarded his lovely companion, and Vane's blood boiled. It bubbled over when the girl looked down affectionately upon the midget at her side, and patted him gently upon the breast, whereupon the creature seized her hand and passionately kissed it. She shook her head at him and made a *moue*, as she playfully waved him off with her open palm.

When they reached the bronze statue of the first Pope, they lingered a few moments until a knight of the broom and mop, who was hastening to them, reached the spot. He lifted the little monster up to kiss the Pope's toe, then said something to the girl; with her reply she gave a decided negative shake of her head, and Vane thought he detected a scornful curl of the lip.

Vane hovered near and watched her every movement of natural grace, with her pretty dress, of some soft dove-colored material, hanging in straight folds from her waist to her ankles. On her slender feet, with high curved instep, she had red silk stockings and black morocco shoes, with quaint old silver buckles, and over her black wavy hair the costly mantilla or kerchief worn the first day he saw her.

Feeling sure they would go straight to the high altar, Vane passed on to the back of the bronze Pope, but to his surprise they turned and came right upon him. She gave him one glance of recognition, and blushing a deep crimson went quickly to her usual place at the altar and knelt down.

That look and blush left Vane in a tumult of tremulous joy, indescribable exultation, and a passionate desire to at once declare his love, for now he was sure he was deep in love.

Seeing her ever in the same place at the high altar, he said to himself:

“Sweet *Ibidem*, you have found a place in my heart; you will, I feel, be always there—in the same place.”

The girl went trembling to her usual station of devotion, with an inrush of strange emotions, caused by that meeting of their eyes.

“Still from the sweet confusion some new grace
Blushed out by stealth, and languish'd in her face.”

She did not look up again; she could not trust herself—and an hour ago her heart was as free as the air from heaven—now where was it? Caught up in a transport and given to a stranger! She rose from her knees, and without lifting her eyes from her folded hands, she walked slowly towards the Baptistery down the long left aisle with demure, outward calm, while within was the tumult of that new being entering her soul and adjusting the magic manacles of

delight that bind a heart in the sweet thralldom of love's first grand passion. Not always is first love the *grand passion* of a life, nor even often ; but with this daughter of St. Peter's it was to be the great love of her life.

Vane placed himself in the same position he had taken up on entering the Cathedral, and waited expecting every moment to see *Ibidem*—as he now called her—go to her favorite picture.

It seemed to Vane he waited an unconscionable length of time, and *Ibidem* did not appear ; 'twas not two minutes in reality, but she had time to reach the Baptistery after he had taken his position. He turned to seek her ; she was gone, but the hunchback was before him.

Vane gently touched the hunchback on his hump, when the creature turned as if he had been stung, and doubling up his puny fist struck Vane a fierce blow fair in the stomach. Though his hand was small when doubled up, it was hard as iron.

Vane summoned the best Italian he could think of to explain that he meant no offence, and only wished to ask where his companion was.

The reply he got was a look of unutterable loathing and scorn.

Vane felt like shaking the midget for the insolence of that look ; he would not resent the blow ; he could have crushed the creature with one hand and in an

instant ; he would not even speak harshly to him, for was not *Ibidem* evidently fond of the creature, and did not the hunchback evidently worship *Ibidem*?

The mystery was deepening, and the anxiety to solve it maddening.

There was some witchcraft in these sudden appearances and disappearances, Vane thought.

“I will now die in the attempt to find that girl! I shall come here to-morrow morning and go from dome to crypt until I find some trace of her. I’ll ransack St. Peter’s inside and out,” said he. “By Jove! I shouldn’t wonder if she goes down some secret staircase, and gets out at the back some way. I’ll make a more careful tour of the outside now to-night,” and he left the Basilica.

He could find no trace of *Ibidem*. To-morrow as early as practicable he would begin in earnest—but now his ramblings brought him to the Palazzo del Santo’ Offizio—the Inquisition. If those walls could speak, perhaps to-day their tale of woe would be past belief. “The Archbishop of Memphis may still be languishing there,” thought Vane. A young ecclesiastical student was seized with the desire for high rank in the church, and sudden elevation to that rank. He imposed upon the Pope by writing to him letters, supposed to come from the Pasha of Egypt, saying a portion of his subjects wished to enter the Church of Rome, and asking that a suitable number

of priests be sent out to Egypt, and they would be received, provided a certain young student was made archbishop.

After a great deal of consideration upon the undesirability of making such a youth an archbishop, the step was taken; he was consecrated, and went with a large number of priests to Egypt. The temptation of converting the Egyptians to Christianity was, of course, a good reason for complying with the Pasha's request. When the ship arrived, the imposition was detected and the archbishop acknowledged the fraud, but hoped to escape by confessing to the Pope as a priest. He was arrested and brought back to Rome and, as *Whitèside* says :

“As the youth had the rank of archbishop indelibly imprinted on him, nothing remained but to confine his Grace for the remainder of his life. Accordingly he was sent to this prison near the Vatican, whence he may find it difficult to escape.”—(1860.)

CHAPTER VIII.

As Vane entered his hotel that evening, he saw a familiar face and form in a man looking through the hotel register; he went up to him, and laying his hand on the man's shoulder in an assumed voice said:

"George Fairfax!"

The man gave a bound as if shot, then seeing Vane, exclaimed:

"Vane Hamilton, by the Lord Harry! Why, Hamilton, I'm as glad to see you as if I'd lost a fifty dollar bill—and found it again of course"—and still holding Vane's hand, "how are you, old fellow!"

"All right, glad to see you. Are you putting up here?"

"Well, no; I guess I will, though, if you are located here."

"I am; come to my room and let's have a talk. I have not heard a word of New York gossip since I left there."

George Fairfax was an old college chum of Vane's, a jolly, good-natured, warm-hearted, impulsive young man, head in all the games at college, and more celebrated for his strength of limb and language than his

scholarly attainments. Vane had chosen a sunshiny room at the very top of the high house for the commanding view, and as they were mounting the many flights of stairs, Fairfax panting on the way, exclaimed:

"By Jove! it takes the wind out of a fellow going heavenward at this rate. I say, Hamilton, I hope you'll mount the Golden Stairs with the same alacrity," as he saw Vane bounding up three steps at a time.

Vane put a light to the wood-fire that was laid. They drew up to the blaze and lighted their cigars.

"Come now, Fairfax, tell me all about yourself first. How long have you been here?"

"What? Here in Rome, or in Europe?"

"Both, everything."

"I came to Rome the night before last, and having found the best European hotels are poor affairs compared with our American ones, I asked for the *very* best, and was taken to Hotel Bristol; 'twas near midnight. I went to bed by the gas-light of one candle. Next morning I wakened to find myself three feet from a stone wall outside the window and the barest surroundings possible. I had asked for a single room, and by Jove! I got a singularly single one. Then in the dim light I read the rules of the house. No prison rules need have been harder. So I packed my gripsack and went to the office with

it and my blandest smile, and said: 'What a cheerful house! How much per day?' 'Ten francs for room, one for candle, two for attendance, and meals extra.' My smile raised him a five on me, I'm sure. So I spoke bad English, and told him his house was as cold as a barn in Montana at Christmas, and a good many etceteras, paid him for the room—or vault—and extras, and left."

"You should reach these Italian towns by daylight. I like going to strange places in daytime and watching the gradual growing upon me of all that is so new," replied Vane between the puffs of his cigar. "But come, tell me what brought you here?"

"I'm deer hunting."

"Deer hunting!"

"Yes, d-e-a-r hunting," and he spelled out the word.

"Well, 'pon my soul, I thought you and Curtis were the only two of the boys of our time sure to escape heart affection."

"How about yourself? I guess you'll find you are the only one of the three to escape, for Curtis has it bad. He's dead gone in love," said Fairfax with a laugh.

"You don't say so! When I saw him he was crying poverty, and was as sceptical about women as ever. A sharp one must have caught him."

"Ha! ha! ha! I wish you could see her. A skim-milk Kentucky girl of eighteen, without any style,

and to me, without beauty, but Curtis raves about her, and no one dare say she is not beautiful. Her hair all in old-fashioned ringlets, two-button gloves, and prunella shoes with elastic sides; can you imagine anything more antique, eh!"

"Money at her back, I suppose."

"No, there's the question, pure and unadulterated love. The Holmans spent last summer in the Kentucky hills with an aunt and this cousin; and without leave or license that plucky old aunt pounced down on them this winter with Mary, and as Curtis is almost a daily visitor there, he could not miss seeing this girl. Funny thing that love is; queen and peasant are alike subjected to its potency. You are the most likely to escape of any of us."

Vane smiled as this was said, for while Fairfax was speaking, the face of Ibidem was smiling at him through the curling smoke and he was saying to himself: "If she had not entered my heart with that glance of her lovely eyes, she would have jumped into it with those pretty feet and red stockings."

Then the glance that met his again that day kindled a new light that was to tint his whole life, and he said to the curling smoke, with her image in it: "I see you always with my heart, my sweet love, I know you are as pure as an angel." Turning to Fairfax with that happy smile he questioned him:

"Tell me about your *dear* hunt, as you call it. Are you stricken too?"

“Well, no ; not exactly. The girl has money, and I’m *trying* to love her for herself. You know I’m a poor devil, with only enough to keep a bachelor going. I came to England with Mignon just for a month ; then thought I would take a run to Paris and Monte Carlo. I soon had to get out of the latter. I lost two thousand francs at roulette ; got two women in love with me and jealous of each other, and while they were pulling hair I skedaddled. I found I was eastward bound, so thought I’d come on to Venice to see the water front, and there, by Jove ! I met the dear I’m hunting. I was crossing the square of San Marco one fine morning, when I noticed in front of me a girl with a very pretty figure and a very large parcel in one of those rotten soft Italian newspapers. About the centre of the square, slit went the parcel, and out rolled the most conglomerated variety of articles you ever saw ! I went forward and offered assistance. In two minutes the girl was covered by the pigeons and surrounded by a gaping crowd of curious lazy beggars. I flung invectives and my cane after the begging thieves, and cleared the coast, after I had at first spread a large silk handkerchief over the poor girl’s things. We began putting them in the handkerchief, when she explained that each purchase was so small she thought it was not worth while having it sent to her hotel, but the little things piled up so fast she couldn’t hold them, so she

had them made into one parcel. You should have seen them ; pearl-shell purses ; beads of all colors ; dozens of yards of lace ; a glass vase all in splinters ; cream puffs, and candy, and the fiend that did the mischief, a little brass monkey paper-weight. He was so heavy he broke a hole in the paper and caused the "razzle-dazzle" accident. I couldn't get a sheet of strong paper large enough to hold these things, and she wouldn't take my handkerchief, and there we stood—strangers—and almost quarrelling, because she would not tell me where she lived so I could send or take them home. At last I went into a picture store and bought a large sheet of drawing paper, and made a cone of it, and after sweetly thanking me, she walked off with her horn of plenty. Now, isn't that an experience ? ”

“ Well, rather. I suppose you fell in love with the girl on the spot,” said Vane, thinking of the electric-fire from Ibidem's eyes that captured him at the first glance.

“ No, I didn't—that's the trouble. I wish I had, but circumstances are working that way. Mignon came on to Venice and took me to call on some friends one evening, and who should they be but *her* parents. I could see the governor did not approve of me ; thought I was too cheeky, I suppose, on first introduction to his daughter. Evidently he had heard nothing of our *rencontre* in the Piazza, and that

inspired me with more interest in the girl. He's that rich crusty old Lindon. I'm not quite dead gone on the girl, but she's worth looking after, and here I am to look after her."

"You are sure she is in Rome?"

"Well, yes, pretty certain. I had a delicate little perfumed note from her through Mignon, saying she was sorry she could not see me again as they were leaving for Rome."

"Pretty evident she regrets not having a chance to fall in love with you?"

"Do you think so? By Jove! perhaps the girl has taken a shine to me. I hate the thought of being a fortune-hunter, but all avenues to sudden riches are closed to me. I'm too heavy for a horse jockey—too short-winded for a base-ball player—no chance to become a bank cashier, and I must leave the golden path of literature to the copper-haired, swithering, swailing Virginian girl, who writes her burning words with a red-hot pen, and takes an occasional jump into the surging waters of the angry stream, with the swish of the rain, and swail of the storm-beaten boughs to cool her off," said Fairfax.

Vane laughed at Fairfax's description of the avenues to wealth, and his almost evident modesty about the girl's note to him. Presently he said:

"Well, now, Fairfax, you had better take a room here; there is one next to mine vacant."

"I'd like jolly well to be near you, old boy, but I'll be d——d if I'd mount those stairs every day to be next room to Queen Marguerite, and she's a devilish fine looking woman—a perfect daisy. I saw her driving in the Corso to-day."

"Oh, well, suit yourself; but you'll take a room here, won't you?"

"Yes. I hope you will 'bum' around with me to-morrow, Hamilton."

"Not to-morrow. I have a very particular engagement, and it may take me all day—but after that I shall give you a portion of each day."

"Suppose you're on a picture; how many have you painted? You've been here more than a month, haven't you?"

Vane laughed outright, and asked:

"Do you think you could paint a house over plain in a month, all alone?"

"I guess I could; but I suppose you artist fellows are like some chess players, hang fire over a move or a color for hours," said Fairfax.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT morning Vane was at St. Peter's at ten o'clock, it was a brilliant morning, and one of late October's balmiest of balmy days. All nature smiled and seemed to have wakened to a second spring. Vane felt the influence of nature and his soul bounded with a wild desire to meet *Ibidem* and clasp her to his heart and keep her there for ever. He felt that organ leap and sink within him as he thought of the uncertainty of such a future.

It happened to be Thursday, when no pass was required to ascend the dome, and seeing an open door on the left he had not noticed before, Vane followed the little group, and found himself on the way to the wonderful roof of the Basilica.

The homes of the San Pietrini who have lived there for generations are a sight of great interest; for to-day there is a family there, who have for four generations been born upon the roof of the great Cathedral.

Vane looked about him, taking in the view from every side, thinking nothing of the homes or lives of those people who live so far above the turmoil of the busy world, thinking only of his object in coming to

St. Peter's to-day ; he looked about with careless indifference, not for a moment expecting to see *Ibidem* there, and then went up the narrow staircase leading to the dome. At the top of the first flight Vane stepped out upon a little balcony or rest, and looking down upon the roof he saw *Ibidem* with the dwarf at her side ; she was speaking to an Italian woman in her native tongue, and at the sound of her voice which he heard now for the first time, he felt the blood course through his veins in mad leaps.

The staircase was so narrow only one person could ascend at a time, and visitors to the dome were slowly passing up ; he felt they all never would reach the top that he could descend ; to go on might be to lose her again, and that risk he would not take.

She was a vision of youthful beauty in her white gown, with a silken Roman scarf across her shoulders, and one bare arm lifted to brush back the stray short curls the gentle breeze wafted across her eyes.

He was in an agonizing ecstasy as he looked down upon that lovely girl, with the glow of health and beauty upon her cheek, and the halo of golden youth surrounding her. Vane was recaptured and recaptured. What a mine of wealth lies in a woman's rounded arm, the wave of her hair, the smile upon her lip, the curve of her neck, or perchance the sound of her voice. Men have bartered wealth, life, heaven for one of those charms, and to-day Vane would give

all to clasp that beautiful arm. Yesterday it was her perfect foot—the glance from her eye. He was in a position to watch *Ibidem* and the staircase almost at the same time. At last they had all passed up. With a sigh of relief and a bound he was upon the first step—the next moment he lay senseless at the foot.

The shrill pained cry of a woman rent the air, and for a moment caught the attention of the people still going up to the top of the dome, then the fainting form of the beautiful girl was taken to one of the small houses and laid upon a couch of luxury a stranger would marvel at, were he permitted to enter; while Vane was lifted to a canvas stretcher and placed in a shady nook, to await the coming of a monk who had been sent for, and who was skilled in medicine and surgery.

The Italian woman was bending over the girl, and in soothing caressing tones saying “Merlina! Merlina! look at me, your own Natalia,” as she bathed her temples with a sweet subtly fragrant perfume from a Venetian toilet bottle.

At last the girl opened her eyes, and from between her pallid lips came the words in a hoarse whisper, as she convulsively clutched Natalia by the arm, “He’s dead, he’s dead, my God! he’s dead.”

“No, no! dear, he is not dead, and, *carissima*, what if he were dead?” said Natalia, wondering at the girl’s strange words.

"What if he were dead! did you say that, Natalia? what if *he* were dead? do you want me to kill *you* for saying such a thing?" she exclaimed with her eyes dilating and her cheeks reddening.

Just then Beppo stood without the open door—from which hung a silken curtain—and knocking on the sill, Natalia lifted the curtain. Merlina held up her tearful eyes to him, and with her pretty fingers and hands talked to him in the language of the mutes, to learn that brother Paul had come and Vane was still alive.

"He must be brought here, Natalia! here, the best place we can give him, and I shall have a cot beside you," said Merlina in quick impulsive words, as she wound her arms around Natalia's neck. Hers was a nature that brings caresses and laughter out of every thing, with every motion a kiss. Even now Natalia could not suppress a smile as she said quite earnestly to her:

"It must not be, dear child, what would father Eugenio say?"

"Dear mother Natalia, you will not refuse me, I want it done before father Eugenio comes. Then it will be too late for him to deny me, you know it will, *madre mia*," and she buried her face in Natalia's neck and patted her cheek, fairly dragging her outside, then back again and saying with suppressed excitement:

"Madre carissima, do go and have him brought

here while I take what I shall need to your room. If you do not, I shall go myself and carry him in here."

All this time the hunchback watched every motion, and from his beady eyes there shone a vengeful light.

There was nothing for Natalia to do but obey. Merlina stood trembling with excitement and the desire to follow; at last the ominous sound of uncertain footsteps with a heavy burden approached, and two men entered for the first time this luxurious room, with the almost lifeless form of the unconscious Vane, who had a gash upon the side of his head where the hair had been cut away—a plaster applied and then a bandage.

Merlina with pale lips and tearful eyes whispered: "On my couch, Natalia—put him on my couch?"

Natalia shook her head and knit her brows, but Merlina reiterated:

"On my couch, I say!"

And gently those strong rough men moved Vane and placed him where they were directed, and bowing low to Merlina backed out of her little room. She gave her hand to Beppo to kiss as she waved him away, then sank down beside the couch which held Vane, and letting her head fall upon his shoulder, wept long and gently as if afraid to disturb him.

Natalia was utterly dumbfounded.

What could it all mean? This child had never been outside the walls of the Basilica, save once when she took her as a little child to the portico steps, the day Pope Leo XIII. was elected. How well she remembered the fright of the child upon seeing the surging crowd of humanity, and the wild gesticulations and shouts of the people, and her remark when the Pope was pointed out to her.

“He’s so meagre, I don’t like him.”

She never wished again to pass the portals of the church, until she grew to be fourteen years old, and Beppo with his keen observation told her on his puny fingers of the music and the flowers of the Carnival time. She fretted to see all that was beautiful, but when tales of accident and death followed, she ceased to repine, and never again crossed the threshold of the Cathedral.

♦

CHAPTER X.

BROTHER PAUL made several visits to the still unconscious Vane during the day, and at three o'clock in the afternoon Father Eugenio, as he was called by the San Pietrini, came as usual to give a lesson to Merlina.

She watched for him as was her habit and ran to meet him, but not with the merry glad bound of yesterday. Stooping to kiss her he said :

"My *Bambino* looks sad to-day, what can have happened, sweet one?"

"Oh, something dreadful! come and see?" And she led him to her door, to there behold what appeared the lifeless form of a strange man. Merlina looked anxious and uncertain—Natalia frightened and trembling.

"Natalia! what means this? Is this the way you fulfil your trust as mother to this girl?"

Natalia sobbed: "Reverend Father, I could not help it, I did not want it."

"No, she did not want it, but I *made them* put him here, and here he must remain until he is able to go from this place alone!" said Merlina decidedly.

“Merlina!”

There was a volume of questions in that utterance of her name.

She turned to Father Eugenio and answered with a look which caused him to open his arms to her, and in that parental embrace whisper :

“I know it all, poor child!”

Then the Father Eugenio placed his hand upon Merlina's head and invoked a blessing.

They passed out into the sunlight—Merlina told her spiritual father all she had to tell, with downcast tearful eyes. He spoke no word of reproach, but gently said, “Merlina, sweet child, guard your heart, that you do not give too much for a poor return.” Then calling Natalia, he said to her, “Look well to your charge, good Natalia ; and do not for a moment neglect your daughter. You understand? I shall arrange to have a nurse from the Benfratelli always with your patient—always.”

Natalia curtesied, saying :

“Yes, good father, I hear and obey.”

As the Reverend Father moved away with Merlina holding his hand, Natalia gave vent to her amazement : “Holy Virgin, Mother of Christ, tell me have they all gone mad ! has the millennium come ? has the Devil burst his bonds and destroyed all the saints in heaven, and left not one on earth to keep us from sin, when Father Eugenio permits this heretic

to stay here? I know he is a heretic; he has no rosary, no scapular, and praised be all the saints in heaven, he carried a very small Prayer-book. Brother Paul said it was Protestant; and I burned it. I would not touch it. I stuck a fork in it when I knew what it was."

Looking in the direction of Father Eugenio and Merlina, she said to herself again, "What are they to each other? did ever any one see such love? And now! now! are they not alike, may all the saints in heaven witness, but not till this minute did I ever see that same look in both. She's as beautiful as an angel and he as a Greek god."

Standing as they did together with the same light on each they were a sight rarely seen: he in his perfect manhood with his classic head, refined face and strength of form, to which his priestly garments only added grace; she in her perfect girlish beauty. Natalia truly said that he was as beautiful as a Greek god, and Merlina as fair as an angel.

CHAPTER XI.

JUST seventeen years before the day Vane first saw Merlina kneeling at the high altar in St. Peter's church at Rome, Natalia Niato, the wife of one of the San Pietrini—which is the name given to the workmen who live upon the roof—was made a mother and childless in the same hour. The morning her baby died Father Eugenio performed the matin service of prayer to the San Pietrini, and learned of Natalia's condition and prayed with her. The young mother was inconsolable at the loss of her baby. The second night after the death of her baby, whose body was laid upon a table at the foot of Natalia's bed—with candles around its head, and many flowers from the Vatican garden about it—just where she could see it from where she lay; a monk with bare feet and belt of hempen cord and hood drawn well over his face came to the bedside of Natalia with a basket on his arm. He knelt beside her bed and prayed for her speedy restoration to health—and he did not appeal to the Virgin Mary or to the Saints to intercede for her, but direct to his "Father in heaven, who hath the power, and is Lord of all." She raised herself upon her

elbow to get a better look at one who made such a strange invocation, but not a feature was disclosed. He rose from his knees, passed down to where the dead baby lay, crossed its forehead, then placed the basket he had brought upon the bed beside Natalia, and silently left.

The sick woman thought it was nothing more than wine or fruit from some monastery garden, and for some moments did not examine the contents of the basket. At last she thrust in her hand—it came upon something soft and warm; in great surprise she made an effort to find the meaning of the strange sensation that touch caused her, and pulling away the cover of costly silk and down, to her eyes was disclosed an infant, new-born, as her own was yesterday morning. The child gave a little helpless cry, and Natalia lifted it from the basket and placed it to her breast. Now she knew the meaning of the words the Brother had uttered in that prayer, to “God in Heaven, to spare her, and for the dead was given the living, which would be to her a spiritual and temporal blessing, which she must receive and care for and nurture with more than a mother’s care, and she should have an earthly and heavenly reward.”

In pressing this warm, living child to her breast, she for a moment forgot the baby boy lying dead at her feet, and her heart went out to the helpless stranger so mysteriously entrusted to her.

Soon after daylight in the morning, when the Sister came from the Convent of Saint Cecilia to look after her patient, Natalia, with flushed cheeks and a feverish brightness in her eyes, showed Sister Libentina the baby the Lord had sent her by an unknown messenger the night before.

The gentle Sister was no less surprised at the quality of the clothing sent with the child and the hundred franc note pinned to the clothing, than she was at seeing the infant at Natalia's side.

It was now all important that Natalia's condition be made one of special care; as her excited state might lead to some serious drawback in her restoration to health. She was given a sedative, and while asleep her own baby was removed and buried, and rarely ever spoken or thought of again.

When Sister Libentina removed the infant from the sleeping Natalia, she found sewed to the child's gown the following letter:

"To the good Signora Natalia Niato:

"To you is given the sacred charge of a child, who is to be kept from the world without being placed within convent walls. You will receive every week one hundred francs for services and board on behalf of your charge. A reverend Father will be appointed as spiritual protector—counselor for you and educator of the child, should it live. To him will be given the authority to provide for the child's necessities, and pay you the sum named, and whosoever may give you the hundred francs one week from to-day will be the Reverend Father chosen by the surviving parent of little Merlina."

Sister Libentina was full of curiosity, as she naturally would be, and thought:

“How rich Natalia will be, how little it will take to maintain that child for years to come; if that infant had been sent to us we could have reared it just as well, and what good we could have done with that money! Fortunate Natalia.”

CHAPTER XII.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS before Vane first beheld Merlina, to whom he had given the name of Ibidem, from having always seen her in the same place, there was at the University of Turin one Felice Eugenio Grantini, a descendant of the Grimaldis, a promising young student, preparing to take his place among the statesmen of Italy.

During a vacation holiday to Genoa, young Grantini met and fell in love with Elena, the daughter of Count Paganini, who was of the house of Doria.

The celebrated feuds between these two families had long since ceased, but in the breast of Count Paganini there lurked as great a hatred as had ever been manifested between the two houses in the 13th century; and when he saw the growing attachment between his beautiful daughter and a son of the house of Grantini, he vowed a union should never come of it. Elena and Eugenio contrived to meet at the houses of mutual friends and evade the *surveillance* of Count Paganini, who was a widower and well stricken in years, and whose household were all in sympathy with the young lovers, who swore undying love and loyalty to each other.

Elena, knowing her father could find no good cause of objection to her lover, declared she would remain true to him, and marry no other, saying to her father :

"Is not his rank equal to ours, his wealth greater, and is he not already making a name for himself as a brilliant scholar, and what more, father, do you want ?"

"I hate the name ! they have always been enemies to our house, not only in the olden time, but in the life of my grandfather. A Grimaldi wronged a woman of my house, and I shall not let a daughter of mine take one hour's happiness to the life of any Guelf; so remember you shall not marry this Grantini, though he were a crowned king."

"Dear father, I shall wait as long as you say, if at last you can be prevailed upon to consent, for, father dear, I love him more than I do my life, and you do not want to kill me, do you ? You know I shall not leave you while you live, if you will only say you will relent and that I may hope," and she wound one soft young arm about his neck, placed her fair cheek against his, and with her dainty jeweled fingers combed out his thin grey hair, while he kept his head bent and his eyes from meeting hers as he answered :

"Well, if you're so determined about it, I shall try to think of the best thing to do."

"You dear, kind father, I knew you could not be

so cruel, and make all my life unhappy," said Elena as she left her father. Now she was clothed in the bright golden garments of hope, which were not destined to grow threadbare by the lapse of time—they were to drop from her suddenly in a heap of useless, tattered rags.

Count Paganini was a general in the Italian army, and late in life married. His wife died in the infancy of Elena, who was educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Milan. Count Paganini rarely saw his child from the time she was placed with the Sisters at the age of seven, until she emerged from the convent at seventeen, and took her place at the head of his establishment, scarcely a year before the time she was pleading with him on behalf of her lover.

Eugenio Grantini was the eldest son of Count Grantini, of Turin, who was a polished statesman and diplomatist, and he was taking a course of studies to fit him for the same position in which his father had distinguished himself.

While Elena was buoyed up with the hope of a reconciliation on her father's part and a consent to her marriage, there was on the way from Vienna an old friend of her father's, who had visited Genoa six months previously, and had remarked the youthful charms of the Count's fair daughter. He was far past middle age and of Bismarckian disposition, for

he told Count Paganini that he admired his daughter, and if he made up his mind to marry her he would certainly do so.

To save her from Eugenio, her father intended to sacrifice her to General Oberstein, who arrived at Genoa that evening. The next morning Elena went early to mass with her maid to the Church of San Lorenzo. While she was kneeling at the altar, her father and General Oberstein approached, a priest came forward and began reading the marriage service. She stood upon her feet, looked about to see what it all meant, and as the service went on her father placed her hand in that of the General's, and before she realized her position, or had time to protest, she was legally the wife of General Oberstein. There followed a silence that is more expressive than words in a time of trial and great anguish; then without a sound Elena was carried in a dead swoon from the church, placed in a carriage with her maid, and whirled off to the station and on to Vienna without change or stoppage.

Elena recovered from one state of insensibility to be plunged into another. She refused food or wine, and when they reached Vienna she was in a raging fever, and Maria, her maid, in a flood of tears. They were driven quickly to General Oberstein's house, and a physician called in. After fluttering to and from the portals of death for six weeks, life took

fast hold of Elena and held her to a world she longed to leave.

When the greyness of dissolution seemed near, the smile of hope illumed her beautiful face—then the giant life would catch her for a brief space, and a living death seemed before her—the greater giant death she prayed might be the victor. She lived to rise from that bed etherialized, and moved about more like a spirit than human flesh.

Her heart was dead within her—a sapless, aching, heavy, life-giving thing.—“would that it had ceased its life pulses at the very altar,” was her hopeless cry.

Maria became homesick, and when her young mistress recovered, she begged to go back to Genoa, for she had a lover there. Elena, knowing the pangs of a hungry heart, at once consented, sending her back by way of Turin, that she might see and tell Eugenio, as only she could, every circumstance of the fateful marriage.

Count Paganini died six months after his daughter's marriage, which filled Elena with a fresh despair—not so much because he died, but because, had she not been bound in marriage to General Oberstein, she would have been free to marry Eugenio. Up to this time she could not be induced to accept invitations; now she was in mourning and not expected to enter society.

Just two year after her dismal marriage, she threw off her mourning and plunged with apparent abandon

into the vortex of fashionable society—was the leader of the gayest set—the toast and belle of every social gathering—the most daring rider, the most fearless driver as she whirled through the park, with her spirited black thoroughbreds. When not laughing—a ringing, gentle laugh, lacking the timbre of happiness—her face was shadowed by the sad sweetness of a past regret. Madame la Comtesse Oberstein was a mystery. Mrs. Grundy settled the mystery by saying:

“Madame must have a lover, who is he? She cannot have learned to love her old husband!”

Then with characteristic energy that old gossip set to work to find the supposed lover. He was never discovered, so again she raised up her voice in surprise:

“’Tis her husband! The old war horse has stormed the citadel of her heart and victoriously marched in.”

So the conclusion was reached, and society accepted it, and found no *fête* complete unless graced by the spiritual beauty of the elegant young Countess, whose plunge into gay life rescued her from herself. She was thus saved from seeing the bareness of her inner life. The hideousness of a life that is incomplete; like a face wanting one feature, or the earth without verdure. How bald is a life without happiness! Who can hide its gauntness from himself? The mysterious world that each breast carries through life can never be reached by any save the owner.

Elena was endeavoring to wall in that mysterious world of hers beyond the penetration of her own thoughts. It was a hard task. Thoughts of Eugenio were lines of gold in a dark sky, for though womanly in her passion she was as pure as an angel. Of admiration she had her meed, but not one throb of human love had she for any but Eugenio, who had chosen a life which divided them more utterly than anything save death.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Eugenio came to Genoa from Turin, after Elena's sudden departure, he found no one who could give him any clue to her whereabouts. The suspense was terrible. Still it did not cause such keen anguish as the announcement of her marriage in the *Vienna Court Journal*, which was made as soon as her recovery from brain fever was certain.

The bright temple of happiness which hope had raised up for his future lay shattered at his feet in fragments of inky blackness. The ruin seemed to include his very soul, and made him feel that death was his most familiar friend, and he a walking gaunt emblem of sorrow—a living death. Like Elena he cried out for that other death, for which he would hold out his arms in welcome—the death that draws a curtain over all earthly sorrows as it brings back youth and beauty to the inanimate form of clay, smoothes the lines of care, and beatifies the departed one. Eugenio showed no frenzy of grief, only his heart sank within him; his features took a soul-hungry, heart-pinched look; grey rings formed around his eyes, and from a buoyant, hopeful youth

he was transformed into a man of sorrow and care. The iron that pierced his soul was hot and barbed with the thought of Elena's infidelity, for his mind was filled with the conviction that she had wilfully forsaken him, and there came no sign that such was not the case.

Two months of bitter, silent anguish, and Maria came. She told him the true story of her young mistress's strange marriage, of the tender, loving words addressed to him in her delirium. But she brought no message.

Eugenio resolved to enter a monastery. What was the world to him now? a desert of dry ashes—withered leaves—no spot of green in that dry waste. Nothing but the church would bring peace to his troubled soul; so, "like the hart that seeks the fountain with a dagger in its breast," he began a course of theological study in opposition to the wishes of his family, who knew he was so well fitted by heritage and talent for diplomacy.

When Elena heard that he had taken priestly vows, she plunged recklessly into the stream of fashionable life, to keep the sound of "it might have been" from ringing constantly in her ears. The turning-point in her life was before her like a towering mountain looming up so close, while her everyday life went murmuring on like a laughing rivulet to the beholder, like a troubled sea of hopeless repinings to herself.

As Elena sought the whirlpool of gaiety to drown her grief, Eugenio sought the church in hopes that a religious life would influence his future to the forgetfulness of his great sorrow.

After Eugenio Grantini was ordained, the Holy Father, Pius IX. showed him great favor. His scholarly attainments were generally recognized; the polish of his high-bred manners and dignified bearing, combined with his wealth and family influence to advance him in his chosen calling. He had not been long in the church before he found that the waters of Lethe did not flow more freely there than in the world of earthly ambitions. He longed for independent seclusion or more strenuous activity. After being a year in Rome he built a villa in the Sabine Hills, about twelve miles from Rome, in the centre of a beautifully wooded district and at a high elevation. The design was half-modern, half-ancient. The side facing the Via Adriana was a dead wall, save for the large double doors which open to let a carriage into the outer court. When the second pair of doors was passed, which did not admit a carriage, one seemed to enter fairyland. In the centre of the court a fountain plays in the sunlight, tossing diamonds in the air. Every rare exotic fills the space that is not covered with rugs and couches of wicker, plush and leather that suit every temperature from the bright noontime to the fading day. On

the first floor and to the north and east, the rooms around this court are furnished in wicker and bamboo, thin lace draperies with pink and blue satin hangings dividing them from the sleeping rooms adjoining. On the floor above and where the setting sun lingers, smiling at the lengthening days, are found rooms in the richest luxury of plush and skins and open fires, with views looking over the classic towers and ruins of centuries, Tivoli and the Villa of Hadrian with its beautiful grounds and historical surroundings, through vine-covered slopes to the winding waters of the Tiber. This is where Eugenio sought to hide his longing for that human love which he now felt, was his most absorbing thought; but here a greater restlessness than before came over him, for he knew his heart was not in his work. He was not long in possession of his new home—or retreat as he called it—a retreat known only to himself, when the Holy Father summoned him to his presence, and told him to prepare for a journey to Greece on diplomatic service. At first the thought was pleasant; he would be absorbed in other work, and new ideas would fill his mind.

He was not long upon his mission, and was returning quite pleased with his success, when on the voyage a young Greek girl, who was going to Sicily to seek an aunt whom she had never seen, and who was not expecting her, and a Greek youth on his

way to the vineyards of France, asked Eugenio if he would marry them, frankly telling him they could not pay anything.

He became very much interested in the young couple, and finding they were honest and ingenious, offered them work in his service. They joyfully accepted the offer, knowing him only as a Reverend Father. Speaking only the Greek language, they were very dependent upon Eugenio for everything.

They were happily installed in the "Hermitage" midst the Sabine hills, and thanked the Virgin Mary each night and morning for their comfortable home. They revered Eugenio as their spiritual father and loved him as their benefactor and master.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Holy Father was so pleased with the manner in which Eugenio performed his mission in Greece, that the year after he was sent to Spain to procure a valuable manuscript in the Valiladolid library. Having obtained the required paper, he pressed on to Avila, to see a city said to have been founded nearly seventeen hundred years before the birth of Christ, by the mother of Hercules.

He was deeply interested in the ancient cathedral, which is at once the entrance gate, the fortress and the principal church of this strange city. The turretted city walls and the battlemented cathedral are silent commentaries of a warlike past. The dirty streets are moreover so narrow, that one must seek the protection of a door arch to let a panier-laden donkey pass, or a woman with two pails of water suspended from a yoke. The greyness of the stone walls and pavements is relieved by the bright scarlet coats of the military students, and the squares brightened by the chattering of the gaily dressed serving maids, drawing water from the centre fountain with long tin tubes into their stone water jars, which

makes a picturesque scene. All day the promenade has an air of *dolce far niente*. Men in sombrero hats of soft felt pulled over their eyes, and voluminous cloaks covering them entirely, lie sleeping on the benches and grass in the sun. Suddenly they awaken as the military band strikes up its martial music in the early evening, and all "the beauty and fashion of the town" come with a sprightly outburst to see and be seen. Red-coated military men and fair mantillaed sirens of Avila dart from their fine eyes shafts that make each other tremble. The scene for the moment interested Eugenio. As he paced that promenade, with a divine of Avila on either side of him, he saw not the admiring glances cast at him.

He paid a hasty visit to the Escorial, hoping to get as far as Granada and take ship from the South back to Italy. At Madrid he was met by an order from the Holy Father, that in three days he must leave for Paris. He was not sorry to shorten his stay here, for Madrid is not impressive with its dry river bed---an arid white stream crossed by many bridges,---its glaring sun, piercing winds and look of newness and its ugly Royal Palace, the centre of a glaring dust heap as it were. The magnificent pictures in the Royal picture gallery and the bull fights are the greatest attraction; he saw them, then was impatient to move on. When he had no duty to perform, no interest in the place, he was ever restless,

and eagerly complied with a request to take part in the funeral ceremonies of a bishop at Toledo. The second day he went to attend the funeral. Toledo, the rock upon a rock, towers up like a pyramid from the surging waters of the Tagus which nearly surround it, leaving one narrow approach from the land side, which is defended by Moorish towers. The funeral procession of a church dignitary in Spain is a strange and impressive sight. The body lies upon an open bier uncoffined---with a silken canopy over it,---arrayed in the richest robes of office, a mitre upon the head, and a crucifix held in the lifeless hands before its face, the body swaying with every motion of the bearers. Bishops, priests and deacons in full official robes, choir boys in scarlet gowns, with immense lighted tapers, and people of every degree following; in many cases bearing lights. At Toledo, where he had an opportunity of visiting one of the richest churches in the Catholic world, rich in treasure, art and historical associations.

The hasty run through Spain made Eugenio for a time forget the ever-absorbing desire of his life---the wish to bury his earthly love or himself. If he could forget Elena, how earnestly he could work with undivided affection for the holy cause. While she was alive and breathing the same air, being warmed by the same sunshine, he could not banish her, and he had made up his mind to confess it to the Holy

Father. He regretted having to leave Spain without seeing the magnificent cathedral at Seville and the impressive Alhambra of Granada. His social triumphs would have been delectable food for a man of fashion and the world; to him they were a soap bubble, empty, light, and only for an instant flashing bright. The magic loveliness of Elena haunted him here and everywhere, and he wailed:

“ I scourge my flesh, I fast, I pray,
But in each moment of each day,
Between myself and heaven I trace
The shadow of a saintly face,
Oh, who can blame me for the sin
Of musing on what might have been ? ”

But a great surprise awaited the troubled priest. No sooner had Eugenio reached Paris than he heard of the death of General Oberstein. Now nothing could calm his restless heart. He sought prayer and pardon for the thoughts that filled his breast, but only confusion came of it. Finally he resolved to sever the bonds that bound him to the Church, and claim Elena for his bride, as soon as his present mission was fulfilled.

CHAPTER XV.

GENERAL Oberstein's death was sudden. When Elena realized that she was free, and Eugenio bound as she supposed irrevocably to the church, her despair was frantic, her reason in danger. Her cry was: "O death, I pray you, silence my throbbing heart, hide the vision that haunts me from my longing eyes."

"Christ's pardon for the thoughts that still
Confuse my soul against my will"

she prayed.

As Eugenio was bound to the church, so she determined upon entering a convent, as nothing but a religious life could mantle her sorrow—her despair---from the world and herself.

Again society put up a bulletin.

"The Countess Oberstein *did* love her husband, her grief is inconsolable."

As soon as General Oberstein's funeral was over, Elena went to Paris, with the intention of entering the Carmelite convent, whose rigid rules would give her the seclusion for which she yearned. France, she thought, would not recall one scene of her past life, but would make that past appear in the retrospect "a false and evil dream."

She arrived in Paris the day before Eugenio and went direct to a friend in the Boulevard Saint Germain. Her friend, Madame d'Argenson, whose salon was the resort of the artistic, literary and scientific men and women of Paris, was entertaining that evening a coterie of leading lights, among whom was Abbé Capet. Madame d'Argenson told the abbé of her guest; who was weeping alone in an upper room, while the gay throng were having their war of wit and laughter in the salon.

Eugenio, upon his arrival in Paris, went to the presbytery of St. Etienne du Mont, over which church Messire Capet presided. During the progress of a generous dinner, the good wine led the talk of these pious men to earthly affairs, and the bright, witty Madame d'Argenson came in for some worldly criticism, without a tinge of heavenly charity, for about this board were gathered six holy men. Then the abbé gave the story as he heard it from Madame, of the beautiful young countess who was about to enter the Carmelite sisterhood. The wine was flowing too warmly through the veins of the other five divines, to notice the death-like pallor of Eugenio when he heard Elena's name, nor did they hear the gasp of a fainting man as he, with a strong effort, kept from swooning.

That night sleep did not for a moment visit the eyes of Eugenio. The blackness around him seemed

pierced with faint streaks of hopeful light ; the sunlight of happiness was penetrating the iron shroud of despair, a strange thrill of joy shook his frame ; he fell across his bed in a swoon, and in that instant the past was cancelled.

He awakened to find himself in a transport of joyful hope. As he joined the abbé next morning, though his cheeks were pale and his eyes sunken, there was an elasticity in his step, a glad light in his eyes, when he said : " I must crave one day's immunity from clerical duty, which I hope you will grant ? I do not feel equal to-day to enter upon the Holy Father's work."

" Of course ! of course ! it is granted." Eugenio set out early to watch the house of Madame d'Argenson, lest Elena should leave it. He did not care to announce himself before noon, knowing the habits of the Parisians, and the certainty of not seeing her before the late breakfast if she were not going out. The time seemed interminable to him as he waited and watched from a square opposite. At last a carriage drove round to the door, and soon a lady came down the high steps and drove off. The uncertainty of suspense threw a mist over the garish brightness of his longing hope, as he feared lest *she* might have already gone where he should not see her that day and perhaps never again. Moments seemed expanded into years. He knew the day had begun at

Madame d'Argenson's—he crossed the street and with his heart beating high, rang the door bell.

“Is Madame la Comtesse Oberstein in?”

“Yes, father,” with a low curtsy; “you will find her here,” and the servant opened a door, which he closed immediately.

With one faint cry Elena rose to her feet with outstretched arms. Another moment and Eugenio was clasping her closely, while she clung to him with equal fervour. He held her to him in silence—a silence loaded with sympathy and deep joy—while she, woman-like, found vent for her emotion in tears and caresses.

It seemed to them as if life were suspended, and they were enveloped in the bright, silvery clouds of hope, happiness, and love. At last Eugenio said in a low, tender tone:

“Sweet Elena, your love is mine still.”

“My beloved, I wish I had all the music of this world, all the tuneful songs of praise in heaven mingled in one voice to tell you how I love you—how I have always loved you,” she replied in a whisper.

“And so you have thought of me in all the gay life you have been living,” he rejoined, as he still clasped her closely to his breast; “you wished for me sometimes?”

“I felt it no sin to wish for you, Eugenio; I felt it **only** sin to live as I have done—loving you.”

They murmured of their love, their sorrow, the exquisite despair of a month ago—the exquisite joy of the present moment.

Then suddenly remembering his vows to the church, Elena said in a soft, low, complaining tone of mingled joy and sorrow:

“*You* are not free! Can you free yourself, Eugenio?” For passion had taught her in a moment what experience takes a lifetime to teach.

In trembling words of passionate love he said:

“I shall free myself from all bonds that separate me from you, my beloved, my life, my all.”

Elena’s questions flocked upon him like the pigeons at Venice upon scattered corn.

At last the great problem of their future must be solved. It was one of grave significance to both. They had paid the debt of the five years of wretchedness in those few hours of bliss, and they determined to part no more.

“Elena, I must make you my wife now in the sight of God. We cannot compromise with sin—we cannot part. Later man can ratify a marriage that will be pure and holy. What say you, my sweet? I will leave this work of the Holy Father unfinished if you but murmur a wish for me to do so.”

“No! no! Eugenio. Finish your work, and when it is done we shall speak of marriage and casting off the yoke that binds you to the church,” said Elena.

"That will not do, sweet one. Within the hour you must vow to me in the sight of God to be my wife. Ours must be a religion of love as well as a love of religion, a sweet, secret love, sanctified by our honesty to each other and the purity which, as the just God knows, is governing our hearts. I see but one little cloud—that it must be unratified by the words of man."

Seeing that Elena remained silent, he said :

"Do you consent, or must I give up my work ? I shall barter everything but life for you now."

"I consent," she whispered.

With solemn tones Eugenio spoke the words of the marriage service, and again Elena was a wife under the strangest circumstances.

He pressed her closely to him, kissing her upturned face. His strong frame trembling with deep emotion as he said : "My own, my true, my beloved wife."

The girlhood had gone out from the beautiful face of Elena in the five years since Eugenio had seen it, but it was none the less beautiful. The mobile mouth was the same, though the smile was more sad ; there was the same soft, waving hair. The dark, liquid, brown eyes, to which the dancing love-light had just returned after those long years of absence, were the same in which years before he had read his fate. In fact, Elena was more beautiful as woman than she had been as maiden.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE day after Eugenio and Elena had that most extraordinary interview, he had to appear before a council of the church, to gain what intimate knowledge he could of the state of Paris in that time of tumult and rapine, that winter of untold suffering, 1870-71. He had to hear the personal experience of those of his brethren who had gone about among the children of the Pope, to alleviate their pains, cheer and encourage them to be true and brave and fight manfully for their country and their religion.

The eloquence of the Holy Father's ambassador electrified his hearers ; his heart was attuned to kind words—the echo of his own affectionate feelings for all mankind at that time. The Abbé Capet looked at him in astonishment, then thought :

“Oh, he's a young enthusiast, he has not been face to face with the exigencies of war, nor has he become hardened to seeing pain and suffering, but he has an earnest magnetic eloquence, and the Church should be proud of him.”

To-day Eugenio soared from earth, he seemed to be floating upon clouds of golden mist with a sweet

face in every wave or vapor ; he fairly exulted in his sweet and happy secret.

He lingered on in Paris, because he had no command from the Holy Father to return, and he had some secret office of the church at Rome that could not be hastily performed, and he did not try nor wish to hasten, for besides the happiness of knowing Elena was there in Paris, the wild tumult that shook France to its foundation at that time excited in him an intense interest. At last the danger approached like an in-coming tide, the sound of revelry was hushed, and people fled through every outlet from Paris, or remained to see its streets flowing in streams of human blood. Madame d'Argenson took the last train out for England, and Elena and Eugenio the last one to Italy. In the intense excitement of their hasty departure, they forgot to ask each other as to their respective destinations.

Those remaining in the beleaguered city were near upon the verge of starvation. Brave, kind men sent away their wives and children, and remained behind to feed and warm the famine-stricken creatures, some of whom had revelled in luxury and wealth a few short weeks before, but were now glad to share the pittance doled out to the starving poor.

Men there are to-day in Paris who carry the impress of that terrible siege in lines of care upon their faces—sensitive natures who, while their wine lasted,

allowed no suppliant to go unnourished, or while there was a chair or table to burn, suffered none to shiver unwarmed. Only the beds were spared, that the sick and dying might recline if they could not be fed.

Eugenio, by being masterful, and offering gold generously, procured for Elena a place in a first-class carriage on that last train, amidst the clamor of desperate men—the terror of frightened women, and the helpless wail of innocent children. It took two days and two nights to reach Rome, and the third evening at dusk Elena and Eugenio were driving to the Hermitage. She had no idea of the scene through which she was passing, nor the goal which she was reaching—even the dismal blank wall that confronted her in the dark caused her no quiver of trepidation. She felt a delightful surprise upon emerging from the outer darkness into the bright beautiful inner court, with its rare Etruscan lamps—its jars of porphyry filled with sweet-smelling flowers, and Palissy vases full of fresh cut roses. The rare hangings of Gobelin tapestry, rugs from Turkey and skins from Russia, all showed the artistic taste of the owner.

Eugenio, seeing her look of wonder, said :

“The thought of you, darling, was with me always, while I was gathering about me what you see. You were always with me in spirit ; and, now that I have

you here in the flesh—shall you be happy, my sweet wife, secluded from the world ? ”

“ Happy, oh ! Eugenio, happy as the condemned soul who finds himself in heaven when he had lost all hope.”

“ But remember, dear, no repining. When you will, you shall be proclaimed the honored wife of a proud husband.”

“ I shall remember, and when I wish to have other society than yours, tremble for your laurels, my dear love.”

Like children they went from room to room, while she expressed her gladness at every fresh surprise. Then he led her to the stairs which they ascended hand in hand, and came to his study with its rich crimson plush hangings and velvet carpet nearly covered with skins of tiger, deer and bear, and an open welcoming fire of fragrant wood burning on the hearth.

“ Now, dear, throw off your wraps.”

“ I forgot I had not done so,” she replied.

“ I did not forget it, but fearing you might feel the lower rooms chilly, I waited for you to reach my sanctum—now, sweet Elena, I give you welcome to *our* home amidst the Sabine hills, and may God grant us a long and happy life.”

Six precious blissful months of true happiness had been passed by Elena and Eugenio at the Hermi-

tage in the Sabine hills, when he asked her if she was happy or longed for the world. For though honors had been crowding upon him, and soon he would be elected a cardinal—still he was ready at any time to proclaim his marriage and his happiness to his fellow men if only she expressed the wish.

“I feel only the time when you are away,” she said. “Think not, dearest, of me, I am happy. If you feel that you are of use to the Holy Father, do not withdraw your services for me. You know I was on the eve of secluding myself from the world because I loved you. So should I not be happy now that I have you? Eugenio, you are my world, my life.”

“And you, sweet Elena, are everything to me. You see I love you more than Church or Pope or life itself, more than in the days of hot youth, with its flashing flames of effervescent passion. Those have died away and left the red coals that give a permanent warmth.”

When they had been a year married and Elena was about to become a mother, the Holy Father detected an expression of more than common happiness in the face of Eugenio. The Pope noticed ever since his return from Paris a different expression and air about him—a manner almost of indifference to affairs connected with the Papal Court. There were those about the person of the Holy Father who would gladly have discovered some cause for interrupting

the friendly and even affectionate relationship between him and his favorite canon, and who at this time hinted at some undercurrent of disloyalty on the part of Eugenio. They could not make out the cause of his almost boyishly exuberant gaiety. From an ascetic he had become in their eyes a sybarite.

The Holy Father at this time said to Eugenio:

"Beloved son, I fear your successes at foreign courts have made you indifferent—have puffed you up with a wordly pride you must not indulge in." Then, smiling benignly, the kind old man continued, "What causes the change in you?"

"Holy and Reverend Father, if you will permit me to ask one question of you to-day, and will wait until to-morrow for the answer to your last question, I will speak."

"Speak, dear son."

"Most Holy and Reverend Father, can it not be that men like me can as well serve God and the Church while cherishing a human love?"

The Pope shot one electric glance at Eugenio, as he flashed upon him the answer;

"No man can serve two masters—God and Mammon!"

Eugenio was silenced for a moment; then he replied:

"But it has been so, Holy Father."

"Ah, but it cannot be again. Prelates and even

Popes have openly sinned in sensuality ; to do so now—apart from the enormous sin—would be to pull the very foundation from under the true Church, which needs all the earnest piety of its lessening upholders to keep it standing.” Then, laying his hand upon Eugenio’s shoulder, he said : “ Dear son, cast out this worldly affection from your heart ; rid yourself of all earthly ties, and put yourself, heart and soul, into the work of your Heavenly Father. To-morrow I shall hear what you have to say. Pray earnestly to be released. Adieu.”

That night Elena died in giving birth to Merlina, and next day the Pope saw in Eugenio’s face that he had given up his earthly attachment, and read in every gesture and look that it had been a hard and death-like struggle.

“ You need not speak, dear son. Your tale is told in silence. You have obeyed ; you shall be rewarded ! ”

Little the Holy Father knew of the bitter anguish that could not be altogether masked—the hopeless cry of a bereaved heart.

The world can pity and sympathize with fellow-beings who are in physical pain, hunger or distress, but who can minister to a starving heart, or alleviate the sorrow that death causes—the hopeless, joyless, void—the loss of everything that makes life dear ? Let us pass over the deep, silent, hopeless anguish of Eugenio’s bereavement.

His changed manner was attributed to the sacrifice of what—the Holy Father thought—was “a *willing* severance of earthly ties,” and a conviction that “the Church alone must claim his every thought.” And so he never told of his great sorrow, but went assiduously to work to find increasing favor in the eyes of Pius IX., while he had some delight and comfort in watching the growth of his beautiful child, and in storing her mind with all that was pure and good.

Natalia was a Sabine woman of Gannazzaro, the daughter of an inn-keeper of that town of pilgrimage, and during one of the festivals of the Virgin, Sebastian Nieto carried her away as a bride to the roof of St. Peter's Cathedral. There she has remained—never having visited her native town nor seen any of her friends or family since—until a peasant woman she had known at Gannazzaro walked all the way to Rome, carrying the dwarfed four-year-old son of her sister, leaving him in her care, soon after the death of her own baby. Natalia was a pious, good woman, superior to most of her class, and was devotedly fond of her charge, Merlina, instinctively knowing that she was of gentle birth. Beppo was vindictive, jealous and suspicious. Feeling an extraordinary devotion for Merlina, he resented every glimpse that Vane got of her in the Cathedral and now he was in a jealous frenzy.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR three days Vane's life was despaired of, three long days of anxiety and suppressed excitement to Merlina. At last there was hope of recovery—then delirium—then Merlina listened to his call for “sweet Ibidem,” his only love. The brothers from St. Bartholomew's Hospital were in constant attendance upon Vane, using all their medical skill and art of nursing. Vane's restless tossings and low faint murmurs, then cries of pain, were alarming to Merlina—who for the first time saw a fellow-creature suffer, and that fellow-creature one she had learned to love, but one to whom she was—she thought—indifferent. For was not Vane ever calling upon Ibidem? Beppo shunned Merlina constantly and looked the picture of misery. His jealousy of Vane knew no bounds—he would not even go with Merlina down to the altar at vesper time. Natalia greatly feared violence at his hands, but dared not say to Merlina what her fears were, and in those anxious moments when they were at their afternoon devotions, Natalia was, to say the least, uneasy, even though the brother in charge promised not to leave

his patient for a moment during their absence. Beppo had been Merlina's silent and devoted slave since her infancy, and she could not bear to see him so wretched. He would not be sympathized with nor be reconciled to the thought of Vane superseding him, as it were. He had been Merlina's nurse in her babyhood, with his four years of advantage in age, and now, to take a second place, made him rebellious, and he vowed a secret vengeance. He thought to himself:

"I shall not let that white-faced heretic carry away Merlina; he shall not live to do it!"

Merlina, poor girl, was in a sad dilemma. She could not comfort or console the little hunchback whose dumb faithful fondness she well knew he had always felt for her. He could not read, and even then words lose the cadence of the tenderness of voice in sympathy, and to twirl her pretty fingers at him now seemed mockery; for she knew the creature was suffering from the pained look which sometimes came to his face and eyes. When she beckoned to him to come to her, he sadly shook his head and walked away. He had been her brother since she was born, and as such she loved him. Now he could have shown himself a brother by sharing her anxiety, love and regard for Vane. She little suspected that Beppo, in his ignorance and warm southern blood, had cherished a growing passion for

her since boyhood, and that the same hot blood had caused the jealous frenzy he now cherished. Little did she suspect the feeling that jealousy had created in his narrow breast, or the plans he had formed for a swift and deep revenge. Natalia was the only one who saw what was working in his mind, and all the Pietrini suspected his real feelings; only Merlina was ignorant of them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FAIRFAX walked the floor of the office and corridors of Hotel Quirinale, the first night of Vane's absence in any thing but mild impatience, as he exclaimed between the puffs of cigar smoke :

"I'll pay Hamilton off for keeping me on a string. It's a d—d shame to have a fellow cooling his heels among a lot of strangers, when he promised to be here to dinner, and, by Jove ! it's near midnight now."

Then going to the book-keeper, he plied him with questions :

"Where does Mr. Hamilton go at night ? where are his haunts ? Has he got a mash ?" and seeing the blank look of the man, he continued : "You befuzzled razzle-dazzle ink-slinger, why don't you answer me ?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, arched his eyebrows and exasperatingly said :

"Me no stand, signor."

Fairfax turned away, saying to himself :

"You don't deserve to *stand*, confound you ; what are you here for ?"

The porter, who is an oracle in all foreign hotels, came forward at this crisis, and explained to Fairfax,

saying, "Mr. Hamilton never was out so late before, sir; he may have gone on some excursion which guests frequently plan; returning so as to visit the Coliseum by moonlight; he may have joined such a party, sir."

Next night it was the same—Fairfax was savage; such treatment he would not stand.

"To be *induced* to come here by promises of *his precious* company and a good time together. It's devilish mean. Confound that fellow, he might have taken me with him, or have telegraphed, or done some sort of a decent thing. By Jove! I believe I'll skedaddle, and let him wonder where I've gone when he comes back! No I won't either. I'll just stay here and have it out with the prig! not a first-rate fellow in the whole crew here—grimacing *parlez-vous de ding dong* French or *la-de-da* English dudes. I've got over the fun of watching them, and now I want a good brother Jonathan chat with Hamilton, and where the devil is he?"

Then the third night came, and there was still no sign of Vane. Fairfax felt some little anxiety now as to his prolonged absence. He began to think there was some good cause for his non-appearance. But what could it be? When a week had passed, Fairfax impressed upon the landlord of the hotel the importance of opening Vane's room to see if any clue could be found there. In opening a small hand

valise, an unsealed letter was found, addressed to the landlord of the hotel Quirinale, which was as follows :

“ Hotel Quirinale, Oct. 1st, 1888.

“ SIGNOR—————

“ Dear Sir—Should anything fatal happen to me, such as death from Roman fever, accident by land or sea, while I am your guest, please send the enclosed letter to my bankers in New York. You will find it addressed ‘ Hamilton & Ulrich,’ of which firm my father was at one time senior partner. By doing this, you will greatly oblige,

“ Yours sincerely,

“ VANE HAMILTON.

“ P. S.—Should there be any balance owing you at the time of my death, my banker will settle it.—V. H.”

Fairfax looked upon Vane as dead—captured by brigands, murdered for his money, overtaken by some awful fatality, and he felt it his bounden duty to make a search for him. He interested the American Consul, and all the American Colony in Rome were roused. Many regrets were expressed that Vane had not made known his residence in Rome to them. The New York press correspondents cabled the mysterious disappearance of Vane Hamilton, the rich young American artist, who had come to Rome

to study the old masters. He was eulogized as a refined, courteous, intelligent gentleman—which he was: *advertised* as a successful and distinguished artist—which he was not.

Facts or suppositions were flashed across the wide seas to be interpreted by the newsmongers in New York, by such head lines as :

“Brigands still at work in Italy !!”

“A distinguished American artist
foully murdered for his money!”

“Vane Hamilton, son of the late
millionaire banker Hamilton,
mysteriously disappears
from Rome !!”

Following these startling announcements, came a story of strange adventure, ending in murder or suicide.

The Normans intended leaving about the time the excitement began regarding the disappearance of Vane, but Mrs. Norman, *mère*, would not be persuaded to leave. She had taken a great fancy to Vane, and she wept motherly tears as the mystery

deepened. When she heard he was indeed no impecunious artist but, like herself, in command of wealth, she exclaimed :

“ Law sakes ! wa’nt he modest and plain—not a bit airified, and so kind ! I know’d he was larned and a gentleman ; but who’d ’a thought that he were a millionaire ? Oh ! I’m so sorry ’bout that dear, purty young man.” And she wept before the assembled guests of the house, to be reprimanded before them by her son, who said :

“ Don’t make a darned fool of yourself, right here in public.”

No clue could be found as to where Vane passed that first day ; no one knew of a single friend he had made, and the American Colony were unanimous in their regret at not having him of their set before such a disaster had befallen him. Fairfax was assiduous in his efforts to ascertain the fate of Vane, which was wrapt in such profound mystery. He even neglected his “ dear hunt,” the very thing that brought him to Rome. The words of Vane were often ringing in his ears : “ Very evidently she regrets not having a chance to fall in love with *you*,” and often they came to him with a pleasant thrill. He thought of Ada Lindon each day more tenderly, and now began to think he must be *almost* in love with her—not, however, enough to give up the search for his esteemed friend.

When three weeks of fruitless searching for Vane had passed, Fairfax gave him up for dead; the Roman Americans settled down to their usual pursuits, and soon forgot the excitement that fluttered in their midst for a time. A precious soul had been mysteriously spirited from amongst them and could not be found—that was all. “It is not I nor mine that I should let it cause more than passing enquiry,” society exclaimed, and the curtain of forgetfulness dropped upon the fate of Vane. Eugenio was silent. The brothers who attended him were silent. In their hands they held a convert to their faith—and he must not be given up.

Eugenio saw 'twas too late for Merlina to withhold her love, and if he could consistently unite them in marriage, he would do so to promote her happiness. For through Natalia he gathered the cause of Vane's frequent visits to the Basilica of which Beppo had told her. Of course, he must embrace the Catholic faith, and that would be a victory for the church.

The rumors that circulated freely through Rome reached the ears of Eugenio; the high esteem in which Vane was held by the Americans; the rumors of his ample fortune; the standing of his family in America, all proved him worthy of his daughter if he loved her. Eugenio truly sympathized with the young people; he remembered the trials of his early love; his disappointment and anguish, and the short

happy year of earthly bliss. The San Pietrini knew nothing of the agitation that was quivering the minds of the American Romans. So Vane was beyond the ken of his fellow-countrymen.

Those first three days of unconsciousness were to Merlina as years. The suspense—the almost hopeless uncertainty of a return to life, followed by days of restless tossing and incoherent murmurs of “Sweet Ibidem” greatly agitated her. Who was Ibidem? It was she, doubtless, that was in his mind when, in his wild delirium, he ecstatically clasped an imaginary form in his close embrace, as he murmured endearing terms.

Eugenio came as usual every day, not to teach—to counsel and comfort his drooping child—to pray with her and console her.

One day Natalia and Merlina were sitting beside the couch upon which Vane lay, outside the door of Natalia's little house, in a place sheltered from the wind by a Roman blanket of soft silk with gay stripes. The sun was falling across him with genial warmth and dancing upon a small dome in front of him. He caught sight of it, and in a pleading tone cried out:

“Ibidem, come down! do come down quick! quick! Some one will see your red stockings! The canopy will fall! Let me catch you,” and then fell back exhausted, faintly saying: “I'm sure she loves

you, Fairfax!" In a few moments he rose half up again: "She's gone again! My God, shall I never find her! Sweet Ibidem!"

Merlina hid her head in Natalia's lap and sobbed aloud. Hearing her he turned in her direction. Natalia asked her to hold up her head and look at him. As she did so; he motioned for her to come near him, then he caressed her hair, patted her hand as if she were a little child, saying: "Don't cry—such a pretty girl—I'll find Ibidem—there—there—look!—look! There. She is letting me follow her—I must find her—yes I must find her—see the hunchback, he has her red stockings on. Don't look at me so impudently, you little monster. Take off those stockings, I say!"

He made a motion as though he were stripping the legs of the dwarf.

Meanwhile, the dwarf was watching from behind one of the small structures, unseen, all that was going on. He could not hear a word, but his keen sense of sight made his understanding vivid, and when he saw Vane touch Merlina's hair and hand, he ground his teeth, clenched his puny fists, and vowed vengeance.

Beppo kept so aloof from Merlina that she forgot him only when he was in sight, her thoughts were so absorbed with Vane.

"I love him, oh! I love him! and Ibidem is always his cry. Natalia, I must die; don't let me live?"

She sobbed upon Natalia's motherly shoulder.

"You must not weep so, sweet child. He does not know what he says, perhaps he thinks that is your name," said Natalia.

"No! no! he doesn't, he sees me all the time, he's saying it."

"Yes, but people in fever never know their best friends--the prettiest look monsters to them."

Merlina brightened up as she turned to Natalia:

"But, kind mother, that day he saw me cry he said I was a pretty girl. I know he loves some one called *Ibidem*."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE day after Beppo saw Vane touch Merlina's hand, one of the workmen saw him sharpening an old Spanish dagger, which was among their tools—an instrument used for severing rope and cord. Nicolo shook his head at him, and playfully pointed to his breast to indicate that Beppo was going to stab him. At that motion the dwarf dropped the dagger as if it burned him, and left the place. During the afternoon Nicolo incidentally mentioned to Sebastian Niato—Natalia's husband—the circumstance, merely to illustrate the horror he supposed Beppo had of stabbing when he so suddenly dropped the dagger; however, Sebastian told it to Natalia just as he heard it, and she was filled with alarm. She secured the dagger and begged Sebastian to keep the tool house watched or locked. Sebastian only laughed at her fears and said: "Who do you suppose he wants to kill? You needn't be afraid of Merlina. He'll let no harm come to her."

Natalia did not feel so sure of that.

Vane, though still delirious, was in a more promising condition towards recovery the day Beppo was sharpening the dagger than since his accident.

Beppo watched the Brothers carefully, and he gathered from the motion of their lips and their gesticulations that Vane would not die.

Though he had passed through nearly six weeks of torturing brain fever, Vane was still lying weak and unconscious of his surroundings. One day he was in a quiet, natural sleep, when opening his eyes suddenly, he saw Natalia and Merlina sitting at either side of his low couch. He looked at Natalia first, rubbed his eyes, then pressed his hands upon his head at each side, half raised himself upon his elbow, and looking steadily at Natalia, "Who are you? I never saw you before. Where am I?" he asked.

Natalia did not know what he said, but Merlina listened with bated breath, for she knew he saw Natalia now for the first time. He turned slowly to look at Merlina, and stretching out his arms he cried as Natalia turned a moment to answer a call:

"Ibidem at last! sweet Ibidem!"

Merlina's arms closed over his head as he pressed her closely to him in one long embrace.

"I am not Ibidem, only Merlina, but I love you --yes, more than Ibidem, or any soul on earth!" she sighed through her tears.

"You love me! Ah! you are sure you love me, and you are Merlina! Who is Merlina? No matter who, or what you are, if you love me."

The glad light of happy intelligence shone in his

fine eyes and animated his sunken cheek, while his smile rested upon Merlina as he sank back exhausted, with her little brown hand still held in his feeble clasp. Presently he recovered strength and said: "Where am I? Do tell me, sweetest. I care not so long as you are near, but do tell me?"

Merlina and Natalia spoke quickly in Italian to each other—so fast he could not follow them. then in a plaintive complaining tone:

"Why not tell me? I must know."

"You are on the roof of St. Peter's church at Rome," said Merlina in pretty broken English.

"On St. Peter's church at Rome! Why, how did I get here? and have I not been ill?"

"Yes, very, very ill," and in a gayer tone she added, "but you are getting well now, *mio caro*," and she blushed as she said it.

"Why do you hang your head? What is it you said?"

Natalia could not understand the English, but that tender expression in her own tongue caused her to dart at Merlina a reprimanding look. Merlina in her love for Vane had caressed him in her thoughts and dreams for so long, that involuntarily the expression escaped her, and with Natalia's eyes upon her she dare not repeat it.

"Tell me, darling, what was it you said."

"I dare not, Natalia is watching," and she blushed again.

Merlina could still scarcely believe she was *Ibidem*; in her impulsive, warm, young Italian love, she recklessly abandoned herself to the impulse of the moment and joyously accepted the fond embrace of Vane, in, as she supposed, a moment of aberration. The full reality of possessing his affection had scarcely reached her senses yet—there was in her mind a sweet confusion, an uncertainty like the motion of a sapling in a strong wind.

As the day waned and a cool breeze came up with the declining sun, Vane's couch was wheeled back into the luxurious little room, which this evening he saw for the first time with his natural eyes. Now he looked about him in wonder and amazement, the dainty belongings of a refined woman were seen on every side; the girlish trinkets brought there by Eugenio, now Cardinal Grantini, were arranged in graceful fashion about the low walls which were lace covered over pink satin, an oasis in a desert of bare metal-covered domes and small structures, with the fair blue sky hanging like a curtain all around and as a canopy over their heads. To night the sky was streaked with red and yellow and purple, emblematical of the bright, rich, true, mutual love of Vane and Merlina. This first day of consciousness was a happy awakening. How threadbare the past looked to Vane, how confused the happy present in his weak state.

CHAPTER XX.

IN crossing the Atlantic Mrs. Norman *mère* had a seat next to Father Lauder at the ship's table, and together they chatted and formed one of those acquaintances which often drift into friendship and sometimes to a closer relationship. In the case of Mrs. Norman and the priest it would be hard to define their position towards each other. The lady was very confiding and ingenuous, and the whole story of her life, and the state of her finances was made an open book to the priest; he in turn told her of his intended visit to Rome, which was in connection with his Church and the American College of priests, at Rome, and left her with a confused idea that they had made a fair exchange of confidences.

But such was not the case, for Mrs. Norman could only remember the priest's name; and when she came to think over all she had said to him, and the little he had in reality said to her, she was truly amazed. However, he had kept his word in seeking her out when she came to Rome, and had, as she supposed, been the means of having her presented to the Pope, and had also kindly piloted her about

among the shops, art galleries and churches, to more than her heart's content. She was weary of it all, and disappointed besides in her failure to procure that sarcophagus which she had set her heart upon after visiting the tomb of Napoleon at Paris. She had never heard of anyone taking a sarcophagus to America for *private* use, and she wanted to go home with something *new*, that is something no one else had thought of.

She argued this way.

"If Boneypart had been knocked about from pillar to post after he was dead, he wasn't took round in that heavy thing, and likely he'll just stay where he is in that sickoffice. He was likely buried and took up again many a time before he was put in there for good ; so I'm bound, Jonathan, if I kin get one ready made I'll have it and no mistake."

Her son pointed out the absurdity of such an idea, but she never surrendered her intention of taking home a sarcophagus from the Vatican until she had consulted the guide upon her first visit there.

For some reason she did not consult Father Lauder about this most cherished longing of hers—she had an inward feeling that it would seem ridiculous to him, and besides she had reflected of late over how little really was said by him in all their long talks, which ended in her giving him a large subscription for his new church, since which time she had seen very little of him.

Rome was very disappointing to her; she had failed to secure that stone coffin which was to be a surprise to her friends at home; and the young man who was so kind to her, and whom she had taken into her motherly heart had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared and could not be found.

She would leave Rome laden with silks, jewels and mosaics, but the heaviest burden was her disappointment. She could give up the ancient tomb—she was consoled with the thought. “Anyway Henry has the biggest monument in St. Louis now.”

To give Vane up for lost was a painful thought, and the kind motherly woman was really grieved.

She talked to Jonathan first about the “sickoffice” then about “that fine young man, Mr. Hambilton” until her dutiful offspring lost all patience—he never had a great deal—and at last made the retort:

“I wish to heavens you and that ‘fine young man’ were both with Napoleon in Paris! all chucked in the same stone tub!”

There was no use seeking sympathy from that quarter. She had some slight satisfaction in keeping Jonathan in Rome against his wish, from day to day hoping to hear some clue to the discovery of Vane, though she longed to get away herself.

She wondered now why she had not found out

from Vane if it was really true that the Pope would not sell anything from the Vatican ; and a good many other things she was afraid to ask her son, and did not like to ask anyone else. .

“Dear me !” she sighed, “it will be kind o’ good to get home again after all. There’s one thing anyhow, I can have it to say I was in Rome and presented to the Pope.” Then sadly she thought “if that nice young man would only turn up ’live and well, I would be so glad.”

When she at last thought there was no chance of Vane being heard from, she—with a somewhat heavy heart—gladly left Rome to continue her travels.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEPPPO had settled into a morbid sullenness, determined not to be roused, and could not be induced to perform the light duties he had been accustomed to discharge. He would stretch himself full length upon his face, then *groan aloud*. If any one approached him he made a guttural sound never before heard from him, and Natalia, with her native superstition, stood in awe because Beppo was now for the first time given the power of utterance. He was filled with a jealous rage at Vane for coming between him and Merlina, at Merlina for her devotion to Vane during the long weeks of his dangerous illness. His peace of mind was destroyed, and now he wanted to kill Vane—nothing short of that would satisfy him.

Father Eugenio came regularly every day at three o'clock. He watched Vane's recovery with new anxiety. Each day he was growing stronger, and each day Eugenio lengthened his visit.

At last Vane was in a chair, then taking a short walk leaning upon the arm of Father Eugenio or the shoulder of Natalia or Merlina. He seemed to have forgotten Beppe, for the hunchback would not go

near him. When Vane was able to read and converse, he took delight in the society of Eugenio. So refined and polished a gentleman, so brilliant a scholar, with such a charm of manner, won him completely, and their intercourse was a delight to both.

Merlina's name was never mentioned by either, though it was uppermost in the thoughts of both, nor was the subject of religion ever discussed.

Vane wished to talk of Merlina, but did not know how to introduce the subject. At last one day Father Eugenio said :

"I suppose Merlina wiles away many a dull hour singing to you."

"Merlina sing! I did not know she sang," and then almost impetuously, he said, grasping Eugenio's hand : "Tell me of Merlina, for I love her, oh! so fondly."

"You love her!" in slow measured tones, "and you know not who or what she is," and he looked steadily at Vane, who with fervency replied.

"Yes, I love her, as the birds love the air, the earth the sun, as you the Church, as I do life—more—"

Eugenio felt that he had a convert in his grasp, as it were; for to gain Merlina, Vane must adopt her faith. Though the Cardinal would not use this child for such a purpose, had not fate fairly tossed Vane into the bosom of the Church and held him there by the strongest ties; the inviolable chains and golden

rivets of a woman's love—the woman he loved. After a moment's hesitation Eugenio said, in a soft gentle tone, to Vane, who had his deep eyes fixed upon his companion, while his cheeks flushed and his fingers moved up and down in his locked hands.

"Merlina is a child of the Church and cannot go out of it—a child of St. Peter's, a very daughter by adoption of the Pope—you must think only of rapid recovery, not of the unattainable, my dear young friend." Vane's cheek paled again. The color left his lips with that flush from his cheek and his eyes dimmed, as he put out his hand to grasp Eugenio's, when he rose to leave.

"Why unattainable ; who is she?"

"I shall come again to-morrow and we shall talk more freely upon this subject if you wish.—*Addio!*"

Vane would fain have held his companion back, He was rapidly gaining strength and must not prolong his stay. He had kept his whereabouts a secret since his convalescence, that he might undisturbed indulge his delicious dream, a dream as bright and fair as the cloudless Italian sky which surrounded him. He had no immediate family or friends to marvel at his silence and be anxious about his well-being. Fairfax, he thought, would have been surprised at his absence, perhaps vexed, then forget all about him. Now a cloud had crossed his hitherto cloudless sky. Unattainable ! He exulted in his happiness

but an hour ago ; now there was a check upon that glowing exultation, an invisible wall of interdict rising up between him and Merlina, and fear was weighing with his deep love.

“What is this priest to her ? What is she to these people ? I must know before I leave here, and I must leave here soon.”

He rose and walked slowly alone for the first time and found how well he could get on. He acknowledged to himself that 'twas the delight of having Merlina at his side which had kept him from trying to do so before. This *dolce far niente* must end ; he must go back to the dull prosaic world. He had been alone some time when Merlina with Natalia, as ever at her side, came near.

“Father Eugenio says you sing, and you have been mute ever since I came. Are you not cruel, sweet one ? ”

“You have never asked me ! Could I volunteer to show off my singing ? ” she answered, gaily.

“How like a drawing-room belle and still unlike, for she would have given a hint that would have called for an invitation to display an accomplishment,” she replied.

“I shall sing for you to-morrow, I have not sung for Father Eugenio, nor even been asked to do so by him since you came or you should have heard me.”

“Come and sit near me, Merlina, and tell me of

yourself. How long have you lived upon the roof of this grand church, and who are your parents? Surely Natalia's not your mother!"

Natalia pricked up at the sound of her name and questioned Merlina. Then they had a long talk in Italian, Natalia protesting against answering any questions. Father Eugenio had the key to her tongue as well as her conscience, and without his instructions not a word would she utter. At last Merlina turned to him, saying :

"I remember no other mother, and I love her dearly, but I love Father Eugenio more than all the world beside—unless—unless 'tis—you!"

She looked so sweetly shy as she halted over those three last words, that Vane felt it hard to restrain the passionate yearning he felt to possess the girl at his side, and he wished Natalia would melt into air, that he might once again press her to his heart. That first sudden discovery of mutual affection and confused notion of identity was an outburst of impulse in Natalia's presence, though there was an uncertainty at the moment of Natalia being an actual witness. However, she had not since seen a similar display of feeling.

"I fear, Merlina, your love will have to bear a severe test. They will give you to me very unwillingly ; but, darling, you have promised and you must be true!"

"Aye; as true as the sun is to the day, the stars are to the night, a mother to her child. Do not fear for me!" she passionately exclaimed.

"You will bear the test then, dear. In a very few days I must leave here. You see how well I am, how little excuse for me to stay. 'Tis nearly eight weeks since I met with that accident, nearly six weeks I lay unconscious of your sweet presence, but, darling, such a glorious awakening from that delirium of mingled despair and transport—to find you were my *Ibidem*." She held her breath while he spoke—a few days and he must go!

"Where must you go? Am I not to see you every day?" she pathetically asked.

"Yes, darling, and soon I hope we shall never part. To-morrow Father Eugenio is to tell me everything." Catching sight of Beppo in the distance, he continued, "Why does not Beppo come near me, Merlina? He will not even look at me."

"I know not. I can scarcely get a kind look from him myself, and we were such a dear brother and sister once."

Natalia was quite worn and anxious. Beppo, she constantly feared, might do something desperate in his gloomy, despondent state. He had been fierce since he knew Natalia had kept the workshop locked. He watched that door constantly, and one night was found trying it, to find out whether it was locked,

All this weighed upon Natalia's spirits, for though the Brothers did all the nursing, Merlina's excitement and anxiety were shared by Natalia. There was, moreover, an additional cause of anxiety in Merlina herself. When she discovered the girl's feelings and found Vane was a heretic, that alone caused her to look with suspicion upon him. She was full of superstitions, and read catastrophe, death, marriage and so on, in the bark of a dog, the crowing of a cock, the moving of the clouds. Her cheeks were becoming pale and her gait slow. Never before had she so longed to see her home in the Sabine Hills, yet now the time seemed farther off than ever, Merlina more than ever a charge. She loved her foster-child with more than a foster-mother's love, and the thought of a "heretic heathen" winning her child was gall and bitterness to her. She did not dislike Vane for any other reason, but Merlina, she felt, was a queen. Had she been told Victor Emmanuel was her father, and she the rightful heir to the throne of Italy, and Humbert had spirited her away to the roof of the Basilica, in order that he might reign in her stead, she would have believed it sooner than she could believe that Father Eugenio would consent to a union with a heretic. Had not Father Eugenio taken her to the library of the Vatican with Merlina as a child, not long before the death of the genial, kind-hearted Pope Pius the Ninth, and had she not

seen the Holy Father place his hand upon the child's head in blessing, and then lift her up and kiss her, and call her *his* dear child, and laugh when she took the cap off his head and put it on her own. How the child cried when she had to leave the Vatican, and rolled herself in the skirts of Natalia and kicked at her, while Natalia trembled in the presence of the Holy Father. And this sacred child had learned to love a heretic above every one! Natalia could see it plainly, and so she fretted and pined. How free her life had been from care or strife until now! How calm her thoughts! There were not even any humble rivalries or ambitions to embitter her life. There were but two other women on the roof, and one was aged and a drudge; the other the mother of a large family of boys. None ever came near Natalia and Merlina's quarters.

CHAPTER XXII.

THOUGH Vane was greatly disturbed about the words of Father Eugenio, still the time seemed interminable until he should come again. The winter had been a mild one for Italy—less rain than usual, and a genial warm sun was wooing summer in the midwinter month. The neighborhood of St. Peter's is one of the healthiest in Rome. To view the scene of the surrounding country from the roof of St. Peter's is like standing upon the outer edge of the frame of a great picture. The classic waters of the Tiber, with its fine bridges, the domes of the city's magnificent churches, as they rise and fall upon the seven hills, the Mediterranean, the Alban hills, and the famous Campagna, with its occasional lonely tower left to mark the stronghold of some plundering warrior in the Middle Ages, the Apennines and Tivoli, the lakes, like beautiful mirrors in green frames of luxuriant verdure, the grey and dusty roads, like carelessly unwound thread thrown upon a green carpet—these were all spread out before the spectator. The grand beauty of a clear and beautiful sky showing the sun-kissed scene of art and nature in its magnificence seems to surpass both.

Vane drank in the beauty of the scene on this waning January day, and though the very air seemed laden with pagan superstition; he felt a charm, a witchery hanging over his ultra-Protestant convictions; an indolent willingness to be led anywhere, a desperate resolve to take Merlina with him, possessed him.

At last Father Eugenio returned. He had come to esteem Vane with deep regard. Aside from all he had heard of him through the Americans at Rome, he saw for himself he was a young man of intelligence and honor, kind disposition and polished manners, with wealth and good family. What more was required or could be desired?

"I think to-day, Reverend Father, is the first time I have appreciated my exalted position, and while I deeply regret it, I find I shall have to descend to the level of ordinary mortals, soon, very soon, alas! for I am gaining strength so rapidly!" exclaimed Vane.

"Would you like a change of scene and air with me in the country at my Hermitage? If you will come, you are my first and only guest, for there I go to be alone with my thoughts," returned Eugenio.

"Above all things, but first you must tell me of Merlina."

"The story would be better told where we are going, if you will be patient," answered the Cardinal.

"As you will, but I am desperately anxious to know everything," replied Vane.

"I shall tell it you to-morrow night, if you will leave with me in a close carriage from here at three to-morrow. In the meantime, ponder in your own mind these questions: is your love for Merlina firm enough to let you marry a peasant, unknown, perhaps a child of shame, without a name, or the daughter of a notorious criminal, who may some day make himself known?"

"I can give you my answer now; it is——"

"No! No! I shall not take your answer now. These are all serious questions, and must not be lightly considered," continued the Cardinal.

They now stood up and looked out upon the far stretching scene. Eugenio pointed out the different monuments, each erected to some Pope—a city of the Popes. Then Vane spoke:

"Ah! there is where your glorious city fails to impress the Protestant mind; 'tis too full of Popes; they and the blood of the martyrs are thrust upon one at every turn;" then turning to his companion, he said, apologetically: "You must excuse my abruptness, but my thoughts are full of the subject."

"You are excused. I shall not disturb your thoughts."

Eugenio considered it a point gained that Vane was thinking of the Church, for here upon the scene of so many martyrdoms he could be made to believe; the Cardinal was full of Catholic fervor and enthu-

siasm—a devout man, but of liberal views. He was born in the Church and of it, but like many reading and thinking men, he saw the arts that were used to keep the ignorant firm in their adherence.

Merlina was told of the intended departure of Vane on the morrow. She received the news in silence for a moment, then falling at his feet where he sat, she caught his hands, pressed them to her lips, and whispered as he lifted her to her feet :

“I fear to let you go—your Merlina—not *Ibidem* any more.”

A shade passed over Vane's pale face when he saw that look of fear and distrust, then he said :

“Merlina, do you think I could injure you with the thought that I could not trust you? Can you love me if you cannot trust me?”

“Yes, yes, I can, I will trust you, but even if I could not I would love you!” she passionately exclaimed.

“Soon, very soon, you shall be my little wife; then, dear, we shall go wherever you wish before I take you to America, but you must never doubt me,” he gently replied.

The news soon spread amongst the San Pietrini that the great American signor intended leaving them. Each looked for his farewell gift. The advent of this great man in their midst was the striking event of their lives, for they thought he must be great, or Cardinal Grantini would not take such an interest in him.

Beppo saw there was some unusual excitement, and showed his anxiety to know the cause. They all could speak with their hands in the language of the mutes, and he was soon told. He ground his teeth together, and danced in rage and excitement in trying to force open the tool-house door, then supplicated one who knew nothing of the desire that prompted him to open it for him. He did not implore in vain. He took from the tools the same dagger he had before commenced to sharpen, and thrust it inside his coat with a whetstone. He then secreted both at a distant place, and midst constant fears of interruption he rubbed away until he felt an edge, and then worked vigorously to sharpen the point, for now he vowed again that Vane should die. The steel was hard and the dagger blunt—but the monster's jealousy was keen, and his eye sharp. The one strengthened him for the work in hand, the other guarded him from detection. When he was satisfied that his instrument had a deadly point, he placed it again beneath his coat, and with the whetstone held in his hand behind his back, he crept noiselessly to the tool-house door, and placed the stone upon the floor close to the door, then crept away again, shivering in the night air, until he reached the small house of Natalia and Merlina, and, peeping through a chink in the window shutter, he saw Natalia knitting under a tall Roman lamp, and through the network of the brazier the glow

of red charcoal. Merlina and Vane were at the other side of the room; he in an arm-chair, and Merlina upon a low stool at his feet, with her head on one arm of his chair and her face upturned to him. Presently Vane rose, and going to the door drew aside the curtain, then opened the door and stepped out. The night was cold and clear, so clear that one could count the stones in the wall of the Castle of St. Angelo; see the ripple on the water of the Tiber; the chiseled features of the statues on the bridge. Such a glorious night as tempts the foreigner to visit the fateful Coliseum, or Forums, or venture to some malarious spot that a Roman would shun. He re-entered the house.

“Come, Merlina, and look at the moonlight with me, the first time I have ventured into the night air. We must see this moon together.”

He took a folded silken Roman blanket and wrapped it closely around her, and taking another one he covered himself with it and they went out—’twas their last night together, and Natalia was rather ignored. But she was not lax in her duty; she followed quickly. Vane stood beside Merlina with his arm about her, doubly covering her with a portion of his wrap as he pressed her closely to him.

Half in a whisper she said:

“Vane, you must not go; you shall not go!” then her voice thrilled softly, “say you will not?” and her arms went round him in a passionate embrace.

"My sweet Merlina, my beloved, I shall not be long—you know I love you."

"Ah, but not as I love you—you are so cold—you could live without me, but I, what could I do without you?"

"I not love you, Merlina! Sweet one, I love you more than words have power to tell."

Bending down he kissed her lips and drew her wrap more closely about her again, placing his arm around her, and moving slowly up and down, he whispered his regrets at even so temporary a parting being a great pain. Merlina disengaged the arm next to Vane, and softly it stole around his waist. Natalia shivering in the cold night air stepped inside to snatch a cloak for her protection, when Beppo, seizing the opportunity he had watched for, darted forward and with his whole strength made one plunge at Vane's back with the dagger he had sharpened.

It struck something metallic, and was shorn of its danger. Merlina screamed with fright; Vane turned to see the hunchback's eyes gleaming in the moonlight, and the dagger uplifted menacingly in his hand, as the creature cried out in lusty tones:

"You shall not have her, curse you! I love her, and I cannot live without her."

His speaking in clear, distinct, well understood words so surprised and astonished his hearers, that before they recovered from their surprise he had disappeared, no one knew where.

This being the first time Beppo had ever spoken, Natalia's superstitious fears took full possession of her, and Merlina for the first time suspected more than a brother's love. Vane was giving thanks that no tragedy had been enacted, and all were so stupefied by the unexpected incident, that no one saw where Beppo had gone or what had become of him.

The trio quickly entered the house. Merlina had upon the arm which went across Vane's waist a broad Roman bracelet of fine Mosaic. The dagger struck this bracelet, and having spent its force, glanced off and made a slight wound above it, from which the blood was freely flowing and dripping upon her pale grey gown. The sight of blood turned the girl faint, and Natalia became hysterical. Vane gently bound up the bleeding arm after removing the bracelet, which he found much shattered, and which alone saved her arm from being stabbed through. The blood that the prick of a pin would bring is enough to set an Italian wild. When Natalia saw it flow freely, she was greatly alarmed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FAIRFAX settled it in his mind that Vane was now consigned to an unknown grave, else he would certainly have been heard from. Had he been held as a hostage his whereabouts would have soon been disclosed if alive, for the sake of the ransom. It was plain to Fairfax now, that he had seen the last of his college companion.

"Poor devil," he said to himself, "how soon he will be forgotten, even by those who benefit financially by his early death. By Jove! it makes a fellow inclined to make much of his life when he has a chance—well Hamilton was a good fellow, a notch above the common. I wish I knew what has become of him. He seemed rather *distract* that night we were together, seemed to fly off the track as he so curiously followed the direction of his cigar smoke, and then with a sort of a jerk get on again. Good heavens! I hope he was not contemplating suicide then; but no, that cannot be, for he seemed quite sentimental as he encouraged me to go on with that 'dear hunt,' and by jingo! it's going to be a hunt in earnest. I'll have to sound a lusty horn and have

thoroughbred hounds to bring down my game, after that day in the Piazza di Silvestro. Poor little girl, little did she know my urgent haste that day!"

Fairfax had had no chance to search out the whereabouts of the Lindons before he became interested in the search for Vane.

One day, on his way to answer a cable of enquiry regarding Vane, he encountered Ada with her mother and father, in the Piazza di Silvestro; he touched his hat and quickly passed on, expecting to find them on his return and explain matters to them, but they were nowhere to be found.

He was beginning to feel anxious to see Ada now, that look of pleased surprise as she caught sight of him thrilled him with a desire to meet her again, and the opposition of her father gave his desire an impetus. How fresh and young she looked in that unattractive piazza, and then that almost pleading look of hers roused the sacred fire of love in him. "Well, old fellow," thumping his breast, "I believe you are dead gone at last. A nice chase you're going to have, hunting a dead man and a live woman. You might have made some headway if the order had been reversed."

At last Fairfax began to look up the Lindons, and, with them in his mind, he one day met the trio on the broad steps of the Piazza di Spagna, his face was aglow with eager delight, he felt a yearning affection

rise up in his breast as he saw Ada Lindon's somewhat sad face; he waited for them to reach the circular landing. Ada passed him with a slight inclination of the head, and went on up as her parents exchanged cold greetings with him. Still holding his hat in his hand he watched her move away without looking back. Then he addressed her father:

"Mr. Lindon, the day I saw you last I was——"

"All right, sir! all right. No need to explain. Good-bye sir, good-bye!"

And they were gone.

His senses seemed to have become paralyzed—then warmed to life with anger.

"Well, I'll be d——d if ever I saw anything like that; and what's more I won't stand it either! Now I'll hunt down the whole family until I find out what crime I've been guilty of—the consequential old prig, not to let me explain."

In hesitating to ascertain the state of his mind and find if his senses deceived him, he again missed his game.

Fairfax walked slowly to his hotel, thwacking the paving stones vigorously with his walking-stick, gesticulating and ejaculating in vexation.

Next day he was even more vexed than the day before, but still he went to seek the Lindons. He found their hotel, but they had just left by the morning

train for Southern Italy, and spoke of going to Sicily or Greece.

"How can I find out their destination?" he enquired.

"No way unless at the telegraph office. Mr. Lindon said he would telegraph ahead for apartments," said the man at the desk.

"Oh, thank you, then I'll go there and enquire."

"I am afraid, sir, you will not be able to do much with them yourself—I'll send a young man with Mr. Lindon's name and the card of my house, and they will think I want to forward something. No, no, I can't take a fee, give something to the boy that will do ;—thank you, sir."

He pocketed the fee, however, and expected the boy to get one too. It was ascertained at the telegraph office that Mr. Lindon had sent the following despatch to Grand hotel, Catania :

"Reserve three best rooms, on arrival of steamer Giardini, for me.

"JOHN M. LINDON."

"Now where the dickens is this Catania? what part of the world?" asked Fairfax.

"In Sicily, sir."

"Oh! I'm deuced glad of that, just next door; I was afraid it was in Egypt or India or some foreign part; now tell me when this Jimcrackey (or whatever the name of that steamer is) sails?"

The young man consulted a book he had, then said :

"To-morrow at 9 a.m. from Naples to Messina, then on to Catania."

"I suppose I can catch it if I leave here to-night."

"No, sir, you are late by two hours, you won't get an express until to-morrow at seven a.m."

There was nothing to do but wait, and while Fairfax waited he had time to ask himself: "Why this impetuosity? this anxiety? Am I going all the way to Sicily to have an old man beg my pardon for not waiting to have me explain why I did not stop to speak to him, his wife and his daughter near the telegraph office that day?" He said to himself:

"I thought Hamilton was predicting pleasantly that night when he said it was evident Ada wished to have a chance to fall in love with me, and by Jove she's off now, and where am I? I thought then how hard it was I couldn't fall in love with this girl because she had money, and I declare I haven't given the money a thought since I found that it is the girl I'm after."

CHAPTER XXIV.

How strange is life! What a moving panorama! How sudden the storms and how destructive when riven by jealousy and revenge! How sweet and balmy the dew and sunshine of requited love. Beppo was tempest-tossed in the storm of passion. Merlina was basking in the sunshine of requited love. No one imagined that the little hunchback had lifted his eyes to Merlina in other than brotherly love, the girl herself pitied his condition, and was a kind, affectionate sister to him, doing what she could to brighten his silent, dull life while he had been her willing slave—and seemed to divine her wishes in any little act he could do for her—carrying her books, her chair, her rugs from place to place.

Now he had disappeared, no one knew whither. Natalia had a vague idea that at the time speech was granted him, wings must at the same time have been provided, and he had been transported! but whence? Next day up to the time Vane was to leave, a desultory search had been made and nothing discovered.

Merlina was too full of thoughts of her lover's departure to take much interest in the disappearance of Beppo.

At last Vane's time for going had arrived, and with almost tragic passion Merlina clung to him, and refused to be reconciled to the most transitory separation.

"My darling, my love, you must not make it so hard for me to go, it is not kind. I will come again so soon, dear."

He spoke in kind, soothing tones as he pressed her closely to him.

"Look up at me, dear, say you will not weep when I am gone. In two months, Merlina, you will be my wife,—perhaps sooner. Remember I must have you! Stand firm in your faith and trust in me."

"They will force you to embrace the Catholic religion before they will let me be your wife, I know it! I heard Natalia and the Pietrini say it. Promise you will adopt it!"

"I cannot promise you that, dear; but if I find my conscience does not forbid I shall gladly adopt it for your sake," was his reply.

"I would have no *ifs* if it was your wish for me to do anything," said Merlina, with tearful voice and eyes.

Then in a half-serious, laughing manner he held her at arm's length and said:

"Well, now, my fair, young priestess, renounce your faith at once and fly with me!"

"I would if——"

"If!"

"Oh, let me finish! I would, *only* you know it would be so ungrateful to dear kind Father Eugenio. He has been as good to me as though he were my own father."

"My darling, I am glad to hear you say that; it is plainly your duty to please him, unless, dear, it is at the sacrifice of your happiness."

"I shall promise you one thing, Vane, when we are married, if you desire I shall be entirely led by you to remain in my church or go to yours."

"I cannot expect more than that. Now, my beloved, a sweet good-bye for a very short time, remembering all vows of constancy."

Eugenio had become very fond of Vane, and even had there been no Merlina he would have had a deep interest in this young American, who was such a true man of refinement and intelligence. No better choice could he have made for his child had the choosing been left to him, he thought.

Eugenio and Vane drove in a hired carriage along the left bank of the Tiber to the Ponte Molle, where the private carriage of the Cardinal awaited them. They crossed to the right, and soon they were passing through monuments of past ages in various states of decay which crowd the mind with imaginary scenes of Rome and its surroundings in the days of its Pagan grandeur and Augustan brilliancy, and later

its Flavian dynasty of magnificence—through groves of cypress, orange and olive trees, over mounds which may cover some glorious unknown temple, up the hill to the Hermitage. The first impression of the edifice in the mind of Vane was that they were nearing a prison.

He turned to look at the face of his companion—the serene calm that overspread the handsome features of that splendid man impressed him with a greater admiration for Eugenio—the admiration of a woman when she knows that a man is noble who is also handsome. He had already learned of the Cardinal's exalted worth, his potency at the Papal Court, his gentle, kind and sympathetic nature, and felt the influence of his magnetism, without the strength or desire to shake it off.

On up the hill they toiled. At last the bare, prison-like building was reached, and they halted but a moment when the wide doors flew open, and in another moment they were in the first court, dark and dingy. Vane's face paled as he thought:

"My God! he's made a prisoner of me."

Silently he followed Eugenio from the carriage, with a dull, aching pain at his heart. When they had both alighted, the door of the inner court was opened and the transformation was a great surprise.

His host now turned to Vane, and with both hands outstretched, he clasped his two hands warmly, saying:

“Welcome, most welcome, my first and honored guest!”

In deep confusion Vane received those hearty greetings. “How unjust I was to suspect him,” thought he, “when he has been so kind, so true and so solicitous!”

Eugenio led him at once to his upper rooms, and in his library he seated Vane before a glowing fire of fragrant wood, and gave him to sip a glass of one of the subtle monastic cordials of the country with its seductive warmth. Soon his cheeks began to glow, and a sense of thorough enjoyment filled him—the richness and comfort, the artistic beauty of everything, and the presence of the esthetic owner dispelled all fear or doubt of advantage. That first thought upon entering the Hermitage was already repented of. It flashed into his mind like lightning, and like it could not linger.

They sat long over the dainty evening meal, conversing upon different subjects; at last Vane abruptly launched the one uppermost in his mind, by saying:

“You remember, Reverend Father, to-night I was to know the story of the sweet girl I hope to make my wife. You were to tell me when we came here. I am impatient to hear it.”

“Have you made up your mind to wed Merlina—provided the church permits—though she were the offspring of degradation?”

"I have. She is pure and innocent and good. Her parents are nothing to me," he said, while a look of anxiety mingled with hope overspread his features.

"Well, but suppose," said the Cardinal, "she is a woman of noble birth, and her parents forbid such a marriage?"

"I will freely confess to you, then, I should endeavor to secure her secretly—that is a dangerous plan to divulge to you who seem so interested in my sweet promised wife."

Eugenio smiled a glad smile of assurance for his child's future happiness. He looked back upon that one sweet year of his earthly bliss, and his heart went out to this youth, whose fervent love and hope were so akin to the passionate human love of his young life.

"Is Merlina the only woman you have ever loved?"

"Yes, the only one I ever truly loved. In my boyish days I was hard hit, but that had all passed years ago," and turning a keen look at Eugenio, "Do you know who were Merlina's parents?"

A flush suffused the divine's face.

"Natalia could tell you more about Merlina than anyone. She holds a letter which says, 'The only surviving parent of the child will direct some one to educate and look after her.' I was well known to the parents of the child, and to me fell the pleasing task of training the mind and watching the growth to charming womanhood of that beautiful daughter of St. Peter's."

"You know no more, then?" said Vane.

"I can tell you no more, except the assurance that Merlina is of noble birth."

"Why was she sent to such an extraordinary place to be brought up?" said Vane, in surprise.

"Natalia's letter tells all. Her parents wished to exclude her from the world, but did not wish to send her to a convent. It was a decision hastily made and acted upon in the time of a deep despairing trouble, at the hour of the child's birth, and in the hour of the mother's death. The marriage of the parents had been a secret one, and the mother dying," said Eugenio in a trembling voice, full of mournful emotion, "the mother dying, it was expedient to keep the marriage secret always."

Both were silent for a few moments, then Vane looking up to his companion's face read there the story of a regretful past. He was drawn to him by the romantic side of his melancholy life—his personal beauty and silent patience, his sympathetic nature and general kindness.

"This subject seems a painful one to you, Reverend Father, so let's say all we can now that it may not often have to be referred to. You know I wish to make Merlina my wife—of whom am I to ask her? Who is to grant me so great a gift? You see I have made up my mind that she shall be mine:"

The Cardinal smiled at the youth's enthusiasm, the simplicity of his words and the tone so full of emotion.

"You must ask Merlina of the Church—of me—for it is I who represent the Church to you, and to you I will answer: She cannot go out to you, you must meet her there, confessing the same faith."

"But suppose Merlina is willing to abandon her Church and come to me."

A shade of pain clouded the Cardinal's face. "You would not ask such a thing of her, a child who has breathed only the air of the Vatican!"

"No! no! I shall always leave her free to follow her own convictions. I promise I shall not ask anything of her."

"That will not do, dear son; you must think well over the matter. Merlina stands on one side of you, your Church on the other. I shall not press nor persuade you, I leave you with your choice before you; we both believe in the same Saviour, worship the same God; the sacrifice—how can I call it such—is not much for you to make when you are to gain so much worldly happiness, and, I believe, true future salvation."

"I confess I have been careless and thought little of religious subjects in the past. Since I came to Rome, I have been more sceptical than I ever was before. You will forgive me for being so frank."

"Carelessness is better than unbelief; religious belief is necessary to true married happiness," said the Cardinal.

Eugenio went early next morning back to Rome, while Vane wandered as his strength would allow, from room to room, or sat in the sun on the Western loggia. There were books, music, pictures; all that appealed to the intellectual senses—the ideal. A man of Eugenio's calling must indeed be happy here; he was just in that mysterious borderland of life which is neither age nor youth; he had a heart full of sympathy and goodwill, and mental participation in the joys of the young around him—a mind burdened with care and responsibility, connected with the growing activity of the Papal court; for Cardinal Grantini was deep in the confidence of the Holy Father.

At night those two men sat long before the glowing fire, enjoying each other's society as only men of intellectual mind and a sense of the humorous, can take pleasure together. They touched upon art, music, painting, sculpture. One was enthusiastic over painting, the other over music. Vane said:

"I shall have to leave this delightful haven at once if I have no employment. I must daub again or wander about until I am strong."

"Follow me," said Eugenio, "I have a surprise for you."

They crossed the length of the upper loggia to the south. Eugenio took a key from a small niche beside the door in front of him, unlocked the door and entered. They first passed through a long room with an organ at one end, a piano, a harp, and many small instruments of music, and on to a tower which commanded a northern light, and here was everything an artist could desire.

"I sometimes daub a little myself," said the Cardinal. "Here you may work to your heart's content; I shall leave the key with you."

They turned back to the music room with its polished inlaid floor, bare walls and light bamboo furniture.

"If you will touch that bell for me I will try the organ," said the Cardinal, as he opened the instrument. "It's a fine one."

Soon the glorious strains of one of Handel's *Te Deums* filled the room. That finished, he floated off into the water music of that versatile author—then in a rich baritone voice he sang the beautiful hymn, "The Holy Name of Jesus." All the passionate emotions of his life seemed to vibrate as he made the noble organ speak in such harmonious sounds. The music had the effect upon Vane of causing a rapture to tremble through his being, as the music of his soul ran through the gamut of his senses, like a glimpse of heaven

"Anon through every pulse the music stole,
And held sublime communion with the soul."

Silently they went back to the library and the glowing fire, neither had missed the light or the warmth, as in the gloaming and colder temperature they were warmed by their own stirring emotions. Vane shivered as he reached the fire and put his thin hands towards the genial blaze, then turning to Eugenio, said he :

“I wish Merlina could have been in the music room to-night.”

“Yes, she could have contributed richly and would have enjoyed it.”

“Has she had a musical education too? You see how ignorant I am of her accomplishments, how blindly I love her.”

And a passionate sense of possession overcame him, which feeling was mirrored in his face. Again Vane spoke :

“I feel ever so much better for this change even in this short time.”

He seemed to want something to say, and was anxious to lead the Cardinal on to talk of Merlina. His last pointless remark seemed to go unheeded.

“I took the deepest interest, the sweetest pleasure in teaching Merlina music. She with her harp and I with the organ would make the welkin ring, only the sacristy walls were too thick to emit the sounds, as there we practised in the twilight, with Natalia, and sometimes others of the San Pietrini,” said the Cardinal after a pause.

CHAPTER XXV.

EUGENIO went every day as usual to see Merlina. Each day she was becoming more sad-eyed and drooping. Clinging to him she said :

“Dear Father, take me away from this place ! I am so lonely ! Beppo cannot be found, and Natalia is so nervous ; and, oh ! I am so lonely ! so lonely !”

“Be patient, dear child ; you shall soon have a change of scene. I shall arrange for Natalia to go and see her people, while I take care of you.”

“Why did you make me promise not to ask after Vane, when I fear all the time that he may be ill again ?”

A smile shone from the eyes and hovered about the lips of the Reverend Father as he heard the arch way in which Merlina forced an answer from him.

“You shall hear when there is ill news. Now, be satisfied, dear child, when you hear nothing. Your Vane is getting stronger every hour.”

Search had been made for the hunchback in every conceivable quarter, and not a trace of him could be found ; he had not been seen by a soul ; he had as surely disappeared as though he had melted into air.

His absence disturbed Merlina. She was fond of the dumb creature; she pitied him—not with the pity which is akin to love—but with the pity one feels for a helpless dumb animal.

Natalia pictured to herself the spiriting away of Beppo by some supernatural agency, and became haunted with fears of the same agency working harm to Merlina or herself. In trying to hide her feelings from Merlina, they consumed her and she became nervous and sunken-eyed. When her beautiful foster-child told her of the visit she was soon to make to the Sabine Hills—to the scenes of her childhood—she revived and became actively interested in preparations for what seemed to her a very important journey. Nineteen years had passed since she had left her pretty native town. More than half her life had been spent on the roof of the grand Basilica.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE studio, the music room and the library of the Hermitage were an open book from which to read the thoughts of the accomplished owner. His scholarship was extensive and elegant; his industry unceasing; the love of music and literature the ruling passions of his life. His wit sparkled in pleasant variety, and his society was to Vane a service of refined enjoyment. Eugenio was undoubtedly getting a fast hold upon the affections of the young American, who was nearly the whole day alone with his own thoughts, and they were always of Merlina and her spiritual father.

He had founded his prejudice against the Church of Rome upon the preaching of Luther, and the stirring incidents of the Reformation. Now that prejudice had been shaken by the controversial writings of Echiuss, who said as much for as Luther did against the Church.

Men like Eugenio, who wield such a magnetic influence, by reason of their warm, sympathetic nature and deep insight into the human heart, are well

adapted to draw the undecided or indifferent to their way of thinking.

"Why not consult the Church instead of the Bible? Why not reach Christ through the Church? If this learned man has found it the true faith, why should I not adopt it?" mentally argued Vane. And then, closing his hands over his head, as he lay in the sun upon the loggia, he said aloud:

"Ah, me! how beautiful are the traditions of this Church! Even if they are not all warranted as scriptural, better be a Romanist than a doubter. If I am long between two stools, I fear I shall fall into the gap of scepticism."

"What is that you say?" said Eugenio, who drew aside the curtain that covered the open door leading to the loggia. "I think I heard the word scepticism. My dear young friend, banish that scourge of modern thought from your mind."

"I thought I was alone. You are early to-day."

They sat talking long and earnestly.—Eugenio only pointed the way; he did not urge, nor persuade, nor even suggest. In their talks, he remembered that the true way to make a lasting impression is to live up to one's doctrine. Still he had made up his mind that a slight breeze would waft Vane into the church, even as a feather that is tossed whirling in a gentle zephyr lights where the last increasing breath impels it.

"'T would not be a great sacrifice to exchange one

belief for another when the same God is over all," said Vane.

"No sacrifice—a gain—an incalculable gain—if you are on the verge of doubt and give your earnest thoughts to the faith of your adoption."

Vane smiled as he lifted his eyes to the face of Eugenio; then he said rather gravely: "If only to win my beautiful bride at your hands, I shall," and he bowed his head as he stood now facing the Cardinal. "I shall embrace your religion, as I wish to be adopted as your son."

"My son, my dear son!" exclaimed the Cardinal.

These two men closed in a warm embrace.

Vane after ten days at the Hermitage went back to the Hotel Quirinale.

Had the ghost of Julius Cæsar confronted first the portier and then the bookkeeper of that pleasant hostelry they could not have been more surprised than to see Vane appear. His pale cheeks and thin form told the tale of illness.

"*Corpo di Bacco!* So you are alive *again*, Signor!" said the portier, as he followed Vane through the vestibule, where his den was placed like a sentry box, to challenge, as it were, each passer-by into the office.

The news soon spread through the hotel that the young American, who had so mysteriously disappeared, had returned. He simply stated that he had

been ill, and having no friends to be anxious about him, he had kept silent.

The effusion of the people about him now made him think differently, and when he was told of the enthusiastic endeavors of Fairfax and the great anxiety of Mrs. Norman to know of his safety, he felt regretful of his indifference to them in his enforced and then chosen exile. His surprise knew no bounds when he heard of the work of the newspaper fiends. He had been calmly thinking there was no one with so few ties, so alone, so indifferent to the world as he. When he was approached for particulars of his illness, he mildly replied :

“I have been ill, that is all. There is no one interested in me who will expect to hear of me through the press, there is no information I can give you for sensation.”

So it was simply announced that Vane Hamilton had been suddenly attacked by a disease that was causing some alarm throughout Italy from its novel symptoms and from the prolonged torpor under which it held the patient.

Vane let the matter rest there. He was satisfied to have people think he was either dead or recovered from that new and alarming disease.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MERLINA trembled with excitement as for the first time she entered a carriage at the foot of the sacristy steps. She clutched Natalia's arm nervously, while her knees seemed inclined to give way. She shrank closer to her foster-mother, then whispered:

"I don't believe I want to go after all."

"You will soon like the outer world, sweet one. Have courage!" said Natalia.

Eugenio silently watched her, with a smile playing about his mouth and trembling in his eyes, like lightning in a cloudless summer sky. Once in the carriage, Merlina, seated beside the Cardinal with Natalia in front, grasped his hand as it rested upon his knee, and with happy tears welling in her eyes, like rain in a sun shower, she looked enquiringly up into his calm face. He gently pressed her little hand as his closed around it:

"Have no fear, dear child, you have too long been shut out from this beautiful world, still you have been happy, have you not, *figlia mia*?"

"Yes! yes! so very happy, when I was happy, and oh! so miserable, when I was not happy."

And through her half smile those lingering tears dropped in one big ball upon her dainty dress of grey brocade.

Then with girlish glee she turned and said, clapping her hands:

"I am to have lots of fine dresses, am I not? Not all grey—I want pink and blue and yellow. Oh! oh!" as a cloud of dust swept through the carriage window. "This world is not so beautiful to be in as to look at. I used to love to see the dust from the roof. I always thought of the time the earth opened and swallowed all the wicked people for Moses. What a cloud of dust there must have been there. I knew it never would open to swallow the Church and home of the Holy Father. I felt safe then."

Now they were passing on to the Ponte Molle, where the Cardinal's carriage was in waiting. On they went through the scent of magnolias and blossoming orange trees in fragrant bloom, and laden with yellow, ripe fruit at the same season. Merlina had become accustomed to the motion of the carriage, and was entering scenes that from a distance could not be fairly appreciated. To be amidst the green trees, to feel their nearness and perfect life was a strange sensation; the perfume of roses, hyacinth, and honeysuckle mingling with the orange flowers filled the air through which bright-winged birds flew, warbling their tuneful notes of homage to the perfect

day, as it waned in a flood of westward light, like a golden fleece loosely girdled in gauze of azure and imperial red.

“How lovely! oh! how lovely.”

They had passed the dust and glare, and were in the wooded hill country.

When Eugenio saw the same wondering look in Merlina's surprised face—as the doors to the inner court were opened—which had been Elena's upon her first entrance there—he could not speak; he pressed her hand but uttered no word of welcome; he could only turn from her in silence.

The girl stood—with her foster-mother at her side,—in deep amazement; her bosom heaved, her nostrils dilated, and her eyes had a half-frightened, half-triumphant gleam, like a racer brought to a sudden standstill. It was all so new and strange.

A little woman with a broad, low forehead and straight nose, a yellow-cream complexion and coral-red lips, emerged from one of the curtained doors, and, curtsying low, greeted the two women in broken Italian.

“Signorina, signora, the Reverend Father bade me wait upon you.”

She took a scrutinizing glance at Merlina, the sight of whom brought to her mind the evening the fair and beautiful Elena came there a happy young wife, and later was carried to an early grave, over which was

now built a small marble temple, where a light was ever kept burning upon the altar. Eugenio had gone there to-night for the first time, to pray and ask his Heavenly Father never to let the hallowed memory of that sweet joy return again as it had done to-night.

"What is your name?" asked Merlina.

"Aliso, Signorina—your servant."

She led the way to a suite of apartments facing the south; a sleeping-room and dressing-room in white and gold, draped in amber satin with tracery of silver; a boudoir in pale-blue with a dash of scarlet as in a cherry-bird's wing. A tall silver lamp stood in the centre of the room, canopied by an azure Bohemian glass dome, dotted with ruby-red crystals. The walls were covered with blue damask flecked with ruby crystals, and in one corner was a harp. Arranged about the room were couches and luxurious chairs, in soft-blue plush, tables and *écritoire* to correspond.

"Natalia, did you ever dream of anything so lovely? I am afraid I am in a dream, wandering in fairy-land."

"*Cara mia*, I always thought you were a princess; now you are at home."

"I feel just like a fairy princess, dropped from the clouds, past that beautiful sun, through flowers and perfume, into a lovely casket that will dissolve and fade away. Am I awake, dear Natalia, or am I only dreaming?"

"Awake, sweet child—wide awake!"

"If this is living in the world, how beautiful it is! Father Eugenio said it was cold and wicked, but beautiful to look upon."

She gave her head a coquettish toss as she went from the boudoir back to the dressing-room and stood before the pier glass, looking at her whole self for the first time.

She held her stiff, grey brocaded dress up to her ankles to see how she had looked before she had a French gown; then twisted a scarf of rare Tuscan lace around her neck, arranging a point over her forehead as of a mantilla.

"I must have looked like that when he first saw me." Then turning to her foster-mother, "Natalia, I know I am not dreaming, for I'm hungry."

"There's wine and cake and fruit in the next room, sweet child."

"And chocolate; I want something warm."

"Yes, chocolate and bread and clotted cream—a feast for a fairy princess."

Natalia placed a low chair before the boudoir fire of fragrant wood and burning cherry stones, which gave out an odor of heliotrope.

While she sipped her chocolate she said over and over again to Natalia:

"I didn't know the world could be so lovely. Look out of that window, kind mother, the beauty seems

so near; from our sky home it seemed so far away as if one never could reach the real beauty through the dust. We cannot see the dust from here," looking down at the plain, thick, white, velvet carpet and blue rugs with floating houris, in whose hands were held a red rose. She continued:

"Natalia, if I were to live here always, you and Sebastiano would have to come too."

"If you may live here always, dear child, you will not leave for an uncertainty in a far off country among strangers; will you, *carissima*?" answered Natalia in a pleading tone.

"Natalia! cruel mother! I shall go wherever my beloved wills and be happy."

Natalia could not bear to think of parting with her child—she saw her deep enjoyment of the beauty and luxury about her. How she seemed to hug the arms of the elegant chair in which she rested, stretching her little feet to the fire, and looking from one object of artistic beauty to another, in a soft, purring way, like a kitten being gently stroked by a warm hand. Murmuring in a half whisper, she repeated:

"How lovely! Oh, how lovely!"

Starting up as though she suddenly discovered a loss.

"Why, where is Father Eugenio?"

"He left this note with the Greek woman Aliso to give to you if you asked for him."

"I am glad," opening the note, "Aliso was not here to see how long I was in remembering him, the dear, kind Father."

The ormolu clock on the mantel struck the quarter to six.

"Is there a dress of blue to match this room, Mother Natalia? I want to look splendid to-night, and you know the room is splendid. Vane will be here at half-past seven, and I want to surprise him."

She took a warm, perfumed bath. Natalia combed and brushed out her thick, jetty locks, and twisted them for the first time in a low coil at the back of her head. Her hair before now had always hung in one thick braid down her back, with thick, clustering short curls covering the top of her head.

"How queer that lump feels, mother," shrugging up her shoulders and pressing her knob of hair, then she gaily continued—

"Now for a train—but how shall I get into it, to begin with, and how am I going to walk when I do get into it? I saw one on a bride last year, which reached nearly across the Cappella del Coro."

She robed herself in a soft Indian silk of pale blue bordered with silver lace, caught up at the left side over a skirt of white and silver by a silver girdle.

"I must have a dash of red, Natalia."

In her girdle she thrust a cluster of crush roses in rich crimson, which grow by nearly every wayside in Italy, fragrant, beautiful and abundant.

"I must walk about to become accustomed to this."

She twirled around and twisted her voluminous skirts tightly about her, then untwisted and tried to "make a cheese."

Every movement had the poetry of motion and showed she was to the manner born. In a few short hours she was transformed from the child of seclusion to a *fille de joie*, in appearance only, of course—for this day she laid aside her peasant dress and became robed in the worldly garments of fashion for the first time.

"Natalia, is not this a lovely house? How I long to explore it. To-morrow I shall lead you a merry dance all over this place."

She exulted in all this beauty, revelled in the sweet smells, luxuriated in the soft warmth, and still watched the clock upon the mantel shelf.

"'Tis nearly the hour, Natalia, and how are we to know where to go when half-past seven comes?"

Aliso appeared just then.

"Come in, Aliso, and tell me all about yourself. How long have you been here?"

"Nearly a quarter of a century, Signorina."

"So long, you do not look any older than that now." Then observing Aliso more closely: "Why do you look at me in that way?"

"Oh, nothing—no reason—you—you—you are so beautiful, Signorina."

Merlina blushed. The first time she had been told she was beautiful was during Vane's delirium, she did not want to hear it from another, not that she did not see the looks of admiration from visitors to the Cathedral. She took one sidelong glance at herself as she passed the pier glass, and followed Aliso down a long gallery to an ante-room next to the dining room.

Aliso drew back a heavy plush curtain for Merlina to enter, and dropped it before Natalia could do so.

"Come this way," she said to Natalia, as she led her to the dining room, and told her which was Merlina's seat at the round table, behind which she was expected to stand.

Merlina stood before the dark, crimson plush curtain. Her pale blue gown and rich young beauty enhanced by the drapery at her back was dazzling.

"She was a form of life and light
That seen became a part of sight."

She put up one shapely arm and caught a fold of the curtain in her hand which made the brass rings holding it clink. She had been breathlessly watching Vane, who with his back to the door was looking out at the setting sun. At sound of that click he turned sharply around.

"My sweet one! is it your very self? No woman of fashion, but Merlina!"

He drew her closely to him as their lips met.

Then he held her off at arm's length and eyed her from head to foot.

"Where did you get all this finery?"

"From Paris. How I should like to see Paris."

"You shall, darling, you shall," and he drew her to him again; "how radiant you are, sweet one!"

"See, you have crushed all my flowers. How strong you are!" as she looked mischievously at him.

He half smiled as he said:

"Sweetest, I feel strong enough to take you in my arms, as St. Christopher took the little children, and walk across land and sea until I had you where you could never get away from me."

She looked up half shyly at his enthusiasm, then nestling closer to him, she said:

"I haven't seen Father Eugenio since I came here. Do you know I feel already as if I had always belonged to this scene."

She drew back a curtain near and peeped into the next room, then beckoning to Vane:

"Come and see, Natalia, all the beautiful silver and glass, and the flowers and fruit too. Oh, isn't this a beautiful world!"

"Merlina! Merlina! look at me, dear; what if I cannot give you all this, darling, you seem so intoxicated by it all—what if you are brought here to be lured from me by all this luxury, and I can only give you my love and comforts—no luxuries!"

She slid down to his feet and, with upturned face, smiling through unfallen tears, she whispered :

"Then I shall be happy, ever happy with you alone." He drew her up to him before she had reached the floor.

"Do not kneel, sweet one. Take this one draught of luxury, then tell me if you can give it up for me."

Still clasping her waist as they stood, he said—

"Has Father Eugenio told you all?"

"Yes, and you are one of us. Oh, my heart is too full of happiness; so much so that I feel in momentary dread of some calamity. Beppo again perhaps!"

Father Eugenio just then came in, looking pale and haggard. A painful forced smile hovered about his handsome mouth, and a weary look appeared in his kind expressive eyes, his step was languid, and his voice sadly tremulous. He seemed to have aged greatly in the few short hours since he brought Merlina to the Hermitage.

With an assumed cheerfulness, taking the hand of each, he said :

"My dear children, a hearty welcome," and imprinting a kiss upon Merlina's brow, "How gay! What a butterfly those French milliners have made of my little grey chrysalis."

He averted his eyes from her during the dinner which was to her a solemn ceremony. Her meals had been served by Natalia in quite an Arcadian

manner, under a canopy of bright red and blue and gold striped cloth, or in her little boudoir on the roof of the Basilica. There her little sleeping room was not half as large as Natalia's alcove off her dressing room here. And yet how happy she had been in looking forward to Father Eugenio's visits and her music with him before she had seen Vane.

When dinner was over the Cardinal said to Vane:

"You must show the *bambino* the sun-set from the Western loggia," and, turning to Merlina, he placed his hand over hers as it lay half closed upon the table. "You are quite a woman of fashion now with all your pretty gew-gaws, not the helpless *bambino* of ten years ago. Ah, me, what wonders time works, but it does not always teach forgetfulness. No, no—you will excuse me, dear children—I do not feel well." He took a hand of each as they all rose from the table and closed his own around them, saying, "I feel as if you were *both* my children;" he fervently pressed them and then left the room.

"Come, Merlina, we must make haste to catch the setting sun," said Vane.

As they hastened along, she exclaimed,

"I cannot manage this train and go at the pace you do. See! isn't it dreadful, must I always wear such clothes?"

She smiled up at him a look which showed complacent self-approval. He pressed her arm to him more closely.

"Sweet one, I thought you were the loveliest creature I ever saw, in your simple grey dress and lace hood."

"Hood—what funny names you men give to women's things," not noticing the compliment.

He laughed down at her.

"One would think you were quite a little woman of the world—girls take to fine clothes like ducks to water. What would you think of never having any rich clothing, little woman?"

"Do you think because I have for the first and only time—oh, do you think such trifles are what make happiness? They are to me what a new doll is to a child, I should soon tire of them, or, perhaps, like them better as they got old."

"Oh, well, take pleasure in them now, you know you won't have them for long."

He watched her keenly as he looked down mischievously at her.

"I know that, dear, but I shall have you, and I hope you will be like my shabbiest, oldest doll, for I liked that always the best."

Natalia came with a soft white wrap to the loggia. She said to Merlina :

"You should come and see all the fine dresses I have unpacked, dear child."

"I don't care one bit about them now, I like my short plain skirts best."

Then detecting a quizzical look in Vane's face, she quickly said :

“ But I do, really ! ”

He pressed the hand which was within his arm.

“ You do ! You make me think now of how Venus might look in a Paris gown of blue and silver, or Cleopatra in a modern French tailor-made costume, being thus changed from the goddess of the Basilica to a woman of fashion. Still, it is a womanly woman, and I would not have you other than you are, sweet one.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALL Rome wondered who the beautiful girl was who drove in the Corso, and the Pincian Hill, having always at her side the pale, handsome young American, who could not be lured into the circle of American society.

His recent illness was always pleaded in excuse. How curious they were to know who his beautiful companion was, with her faithful *bonne* always sitting with her back to the horses. The carriage and the horses were unknown ; there was no crest, no livery, only the patrician beauty of the girl to indicate rank. Vane was the envy of all, and at his hotel kept up the pleasant mystery, knowing the gossips could not solve it. Merlina leaned back among the carriage cushions with the air of a duchess ; even Queen Margarita looked no more at home in her barouche as it bowled after the Cardinal's plain, dark-green carriage. They visited the principal places of interest together, Merlina always holding tightly to the hand of Natalia on the one side while Vane walked beside her on the other. She felt nervous and frightened with so many strangers about, and, besides, she was

haunted by the fear that Beppo would again attempt to injure Vane.

"You must get accustomed to the crowds before the carnival time, sweet one."

"I know I shall be afraid; even the noise which reached our sky home, when Beppo—poor Beppo—used to tell me of the accidents, always alarmed me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

GEORGE FAIRFAX passed a sleepless night, fearing he might miss the train next morning, after he had found the route the Lindons had taken.

He was at the train half an hour before it started. He manifested a great deal of impatience, spoke in broken English in a loud tone to the porters, thinking they could understand that better than correct language. He had experienced some of the delays of Italian railway travel, but never was so anxious before to be off. At last the guard gave the signal, and they started. The express trains are tiresome enough, but if one feels obliged from any necessity to patronize the accommodation trains, time, money and patience are expended, which would be better used in walking part of the way and going express the other part. After tedious travelling and much chafing, Fairfax was landed at Catania, and went to the Grand Hotel Catania.

"Yes, Meester, Signor Liendon and de fambly is my guest; but she's out," was the answer to his enquiry.

"Then give me the best room you can, and be lively about it."

He went to the lower regions of the hotel and had a bath, put on a white flannel yachting costume and sauntered down to the bay. The air was balmy and pleasant. Very few people were about, it being the hour of *siesta*. Lazy loungers and sleepy boatmen were about the shore in various drowsy attitudes. Those who were not dead asleep pounced upon Fairfax, each offering the best boat to be found on the Mediterranean Sea. Fairfax waved the malodorous crowd back, shaking his head in the negative. One boatman took a look seaward, made some remark at which all turned suddenly from him and looked out to sea.

Fairfax looked too, and there he saw a small boat with its sail kissing the waves, and a white handkerchief waving frantically in the air. He shouted to the men to man a boat and start out. They knew from his manner and tone what he meant, but they only shrugged their shoulders, refusing to stir. He selected the best looking boat, snatched the oars from the owner, whom he knocked over into the sand when he demanded back his oars, jumped into the boat and with a long stroke pulled out to sea. He then threw off his flannel coat, slipped down his braces, and with masterly strokes was soon alongside the craft in distress.

"My God! Ada, is it you?"

The frightened girl opened her eyes and looked up at the sound of his voice. She had closed them, as she did not want to see the danger. She could feel it, and when she heard the dipping of oars thought it was the flutter of their little sail, which was flapping in the water. She felt she could hold on no longer, and was just about to loose her hold to the boat's side, when Fairfax, calling her name, caused her to open her eyes. With difficulty he got her into his boat.

"My father, Mr. Fairfax, my father!"

Her father was clinging to the boat still. Fairfax whispered in her ear:

"Yes, dear, I shall save your father."

While he was dragging him and Mr. Lindon was doing his best to get into the stern of the boat, Fairfax was saying to himself:

"The confounded old prig, I wonder how he likes being rescued by me? I guess he'll find his head pretty warm if those proverbial coals of fire are of the scorching order."

"Oh, Mr. Fairfax, we shall owe you a debt of gratitude we can never repay."

"Oh, yes, you can, sir! When I send in my bill I hope you'll attend to it and not make me sue you," in an undertone he added, "very much."

"Certainly not," and the old man smiled a ghastly smile, not knowing in the least what his rescuer

meant. "We lost our rudder and the boat capsized ;" looking over Fairfax's shoulder at Ada, "I see, my dear, I was wrong not to have brought a boatman or to have left the sail off."

Ada sat in her dripping clothes facing Fairfax. She had never thought him so handsome before. He had loosened his blue necktie and bared his throat ; he took off his soft felt hat, which left a red mark across his moist white brow, and handed it to Ada, after shaking it to cool it and wiping the inside.

"Will you object to putting this on your head and pulling down the rim to shade your eyes." Then, bending over, he added, "Of course I'd rather you did not hide your eyes, but the sun is beating right down on your face and you know my back is to it."

She blushed as she took the hat.

He had rescued her from drowning, but had he not slighted her that day in Rome, when she was so anxious to speak with him ? However, she put on the hat not to appear ungrateful. Fairfax beamed with satisfaction at the good fortune which put him in the way of rescuing these two particular people. He said to himself—

"Of course I'd go to the rescue of any poor devil, but to find it's just the one of all others I'd prefer saving, why, it's jolly good luck and no mistake."

Then he said to Ada—

"I hope, Miss Lindon, you are not chilly in your

wet things. We'll be on shore in two minutes more."

"I am quite comfortable, thank you," said she.

"Don't stir, please. I'll soon have this craft on land," as he gave one master stroke with the oars which sent the boat crunching over the pebbles, then a dip of the oars—a leap from the boat and a powerful lunge from a strong pair of arms and the boat was on dry land.

Ada put her foot on the side of the boat, Fairfax took her in his strong arms and for a moment they were heart to heart as he lifted her to the ground. Their eyes met and in an instant they knew each other's secret.

"How I disliked him," thought she, "that day I met him on the piazza steps. He did not look one bit handsome then, but how fair and whole-soul'd he seems to-day in contrast with all those swarthy sons of Italy."

Fairfax had no patience with the platitudes of Mr. Lindon and his deep gratitude. "I tell you what, George Fairfax," he said to himself, "you made a master-stroke in saving that old top's life. By Jove! I could have settled the whole business when he was hanging on that craft like grim death if I had just said, 'your daughter or your life.' The daughter would have been handed over in double quick time."

Mr. Lindon was watching for him in the hall at

the dinner hour. Ada and her mother came down stairs at dinner time to see Mr. Lindon button-hole Fairfax and ask him to their table. This was rather tame, he thought; he had rather have more romance about winning a bride.

In the moonlight on the broad piazza of the hotel after dinner, groups of people were gathered. Ada kept close to her parents. Fairfax hinted that a brisk walk would be the best thing after a wetting, that the moon was clear enough to count the pebbles on the shore, and he'd like to make a wager that it could be done. Still there was no acquiescence on the part of Ada, no intimation that he wished her to go with him. She looked very pretty in her pink nun's veiling dress and cream lace, with a diaphanous soft white scarf over her head. Her seeming cool indifference made Fairfax determined to get her away by herself for a few moments' conversation. At last finding nothing but a plain question would do, he said—

“Miss Lindon, won't you take a little walk with me, the night is so fine? let us go where we can see the play of this beautiful moon on the water.”

They walked straight down in front of the hotel to a spot about twenty rods from the house.

“Let us sit here,” said he.

They sat looking silently out to seaward, there was a gentle ripple on the blue water which seemed

to be coquetting with the moon. Anon the moon would hide its face beneath some passing cloud. The ripple of the sea went rudely on like a bold woman's laughter at a coarse jest, then a wave would wash the shore and rustle the pebbles, as if taking a long breath for more laughter.

Fairfax moved a little nearer to Ada, then quite close.

"Miss Ada, don't you think we have been looking at the moon long enough, and been quiet enough to drink in the whole Mediterranean Sea. You'll observe I've never whistled once."

"Never whistled! what do you mean?"

"When I was a boy and sent to draw cider, I was always told to whistle all the time so they'd know I wasn't drinking any."

"Oh, I see. I wasn't thinking about the moon or the sea either. I was thinking of the stars, and when I was a child."

"What about the stars?"

"I used to think they were gimlet holes into heaven and the glory shining through, and when God was angry he drew a black awning over the holes, so we couldn't see the glory."

"And the moon?"

"Oh, the moon was a window of course, and He did the same thing with that; and the man in it was the bookkeeper, putting down all our bad deeds."

"What a pretty sentiment! Do you know what I came to Catania for, Miss Ada?"

"To see the moon, I suppose," she archly replied.

"No, to see an angel—to see you!"

"To see me! Why should you come all this distance to see me when you wouldn't stop a moment to speak to me in the street in Rome." Her voice trembled.

"That is what brought me; I wanted to explain all to you. I know you will forgive that apparent slight when you know the circumstances."

He told the story of Vane's disappearance and all the mystery and anxiety connected with it. She passed her hand over to him, he pressed it to his lips, and drawing her gently to him placed one arm around her, and with the other hand he held up her face and pressed his lips to hers.

"You are mine."

"Yes." An eloquent silence followed, and then he said:

"I say, dear, the Governor is rather down on me, isn't he?"

He gave her a tighter pressure.

"No, not now." She smiled up at him and added: "You should hear him praise you to mamma."

George said to himself, "The blooming old turn-coat!" Then to Ada:

"But he was; in Venice every word was icy and

cutting, and every look was freezing. You didn't tell him we had met before."

"No; he's peculiar and asks so many questions, you know, and——"

"He couldn't have said anything to a fellow's helping a girl to pick up her things, could he? Besides, dearest, there was nothing in it—we were perfect strangers."

"Oh, yes, I know—but—but, you know—there was—there was something in it—I—I—I liked you from the first—"

"You did! My darling! my darling! I must have liked you from the first. Anyway I am going to like you to the last—as sure as a gun I am," and he gave her a tighter pressure. "Excuse me, I mean as sure as the moon is shining, 'by yonder moon, I swear I love thee.' Now, isn't that quite in the *Romeo and Juliet* style?"

He was as happy and gay as a lark.

"Now let me see," he went on, "we have known each other just about two months, quite long enough, in two weeks more I want you to be Mrs. F—. There's no use dilly-dallying. I've loved you all my life. Don't look at me so doubtingly, for my sweet girl, I only began to live the day I saw you. Before that I was a grub—grubby. Now I am a love-winged butterfly."

Then with his characteristic quaintness of expres-

sion he described his feelings upon several occasions and his experiences upon others. He was in a vein of mad merriment, and as he said, "as happy as a fly."

His hilarity was contagious. Ada, who was appreciative of the ridiculous, was amused, and soon their laughter reached the loungers on the hotel verandah, and dispelled all suspicion of love-making between the two young people, the outlines of whose figures were indistinct.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHETHER the Holy Father Pius the Ninth ever suspected the paternity of Merlina was not known, certainly Pope Leo did not. Cardinal Grantini told him a daughter of his house, a Grantini, a countess in her own right, was to marry a young American, a convert to the Church.

“Will it please the Holy Father to perform the marriage ceremony?” and seeing a look of enquiry in the sharp eyes of the Pope, he continued: “It will be my duty to give this child of my lineage to her worthy suitor. No higher honor can be conferred than the blessing of the Holy Father at the time of marriage.”

“My son, I shall gladly do as you wish. Your family have a claim from wordly rank if for no other reason.”

Cardinal Grantini, or Father Eugenio, as Merlina had always called him, never recovered his wonted cheerfulness after her entrance to the Hermitage. She brought back the past so vividly—that past which he felt at times was beyond the reach of desire. For was not Elena dead?

"Dead! Dead! My soul's delight. In my heart's core all these years there has lurked the one desire to cross the river of life and be with my beloved," he said, in longing, yearning agony. How deeply the lines were writing the story of his heart in his handsome face! How weary the lithesome step of two short weeks ago had become! The voice was still as musical and gentle as ever, but the tone was sad—like the singing of the nuns in the Trinità de Monti.

The evening before the marriage Father Eugenio spent alone with Merlina. He told her the story of his life, as though it were of another. When he had finished he put out his arms to her, crying:

"Elena was your mother! I am your father! Elena! Elena! Look down from Heaven and bless your child!"

He wound his arms around her slender form, and pressed her frantically to his breast. Her arms were tightly closed about his neck as she sobbed: "Father! father! my father! my own darling father, how I love you! Sweet parent, do not weep."

Tears were fast following each other down his cheeks. Merlina, with a dainty little handkerchief, wiped first Eugenio's cheeks and then her own, which she pressed close to his, as she sobbed:

"It breaks my heart, dear father, to see you weep. Look at me—I'm not crying."

She turned her eyes brimming with unshed tears to him. He gently pressed her head upon his shoulder and rested his face against hers. In a low tone he spoke of the life before her, and what she could make it; of Vane's deep love, "Vane, who once thought he was going to marry an unknown waif, but whose love had proved so true."

"When you are wedded, dear child, tell the story of my life to your husband; he will not love you the less, nor me either, I hope." Then kissing her brow, he added: "A few more days will tell what I shall do about confessing all to the Holy Father. My secret is with you and Vane."

The next morning at ten the Cardinal Grantini, with his beautiful child, went up the private staircase on the south to the Sistine chapel.

Natalia wept throughout the whole service. Merlina caught the happy expression on her father's face and was radiant.

During the ceremony Eugenio's face reflected his perfect contentment and happiness, as though an unseen angel had shot sunbeams into his heart, lifted the burden of years from his shoulders and canonized him a saint.

As the service went on and the Holy Father, in a clear ringing voice, with almost more reverberation than was natural, said—giving Merlina's whole name—

"I, Merlina Grantini, take thee, Vane, etc."

Merlina in as clear a voice repeated the words.

Vane read the Cardinal's secret in that name.

As the Pope repeated the words, Vane turned one look upon Eugenio, whose eyes were looking heavenward and his hands one upon another were placed upon the cross at his breast. He looked as if he were watching his spirit ascending to heaven.

The service over, he kissed Merlina's brow and clasped Vane's hand :

"My dear son, my own dear son, God bless you!"

Before they entered the carriage in the court below, Eugenio warmly embraced Merlina and bade her farewell in these words—

"My sweet child, I seem only to have found you to lose you. A fond farewell, God bless you! Your mother beckoned me from heaven to-day, and she smiled down upon you, dear one, to wish you happiness."

Natalia, and Demetrius, the Cardinal's Greek servant, had started with the luggage to Ostia, fifteen miles from Rome, where a yacht was waiting to take them down the coast.

It had been the rule at the Hermitage when the Cardinal was at his devotions to place his evening meal upon the table and leave it. Aliso deeming that this night he would like to be alone, made a dainty repast and served it in his library as attractively as

possible. She drew the rich curtains so as to leave only a streak of the crimson and golden sunset to cross the table and shimmer amidst the crystal and silver; heaped the fragrant wood and resinous cones upon the fire, placed fresh cut flowers everywhere to advantage and then retired.

The next morning she came up to find the room undisturbed and the viands untasted. She knocked at the Cardinal's door, no answer; then she went to his private chapel and back again to his chamber and still no answer. Demetrius was called, he opened the chamber door and found the bed undisturbed. Tremblingly they both went through the house, the grounds, and at last to the sacred temple into which they had never seen him enter until the day Merlina came.

There upon the marble slab covering the mortal remains of his dead Elena lay the lifeless form of Eugenio Gratiani in the prime of manhood's years.

The day after Merlina and Vane were married, some workmen were cleaning out a shoot which ran from the roof of the Basilica to the ground and into which all the rubbish from the roof was swept, and from it they dragged the remains of Beppo, the little hunchback. After his attempt to stab Vane, he rushed to the shoot, opened the trap door and jumped in; the door closed over him, and so he was ushered into eternity.

Half of his fortune Cardinal Grantini left to the Church, after a handsome annuity had been settled upon Natalia and his Greek servants Demetrius and Aliso. The rest was left to his daughter, Mrs. Vane Hamilton.

THE END.





